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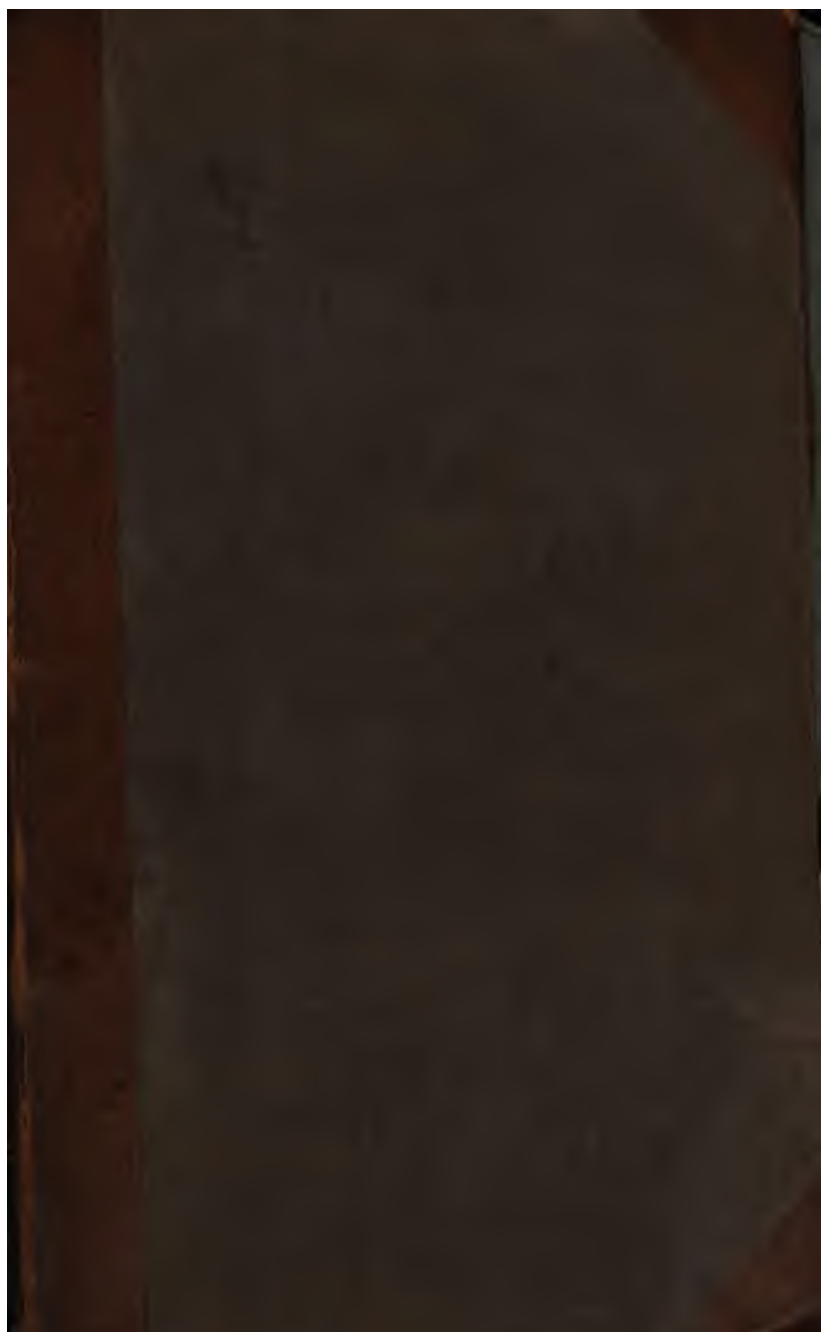
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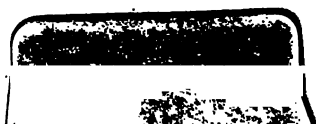
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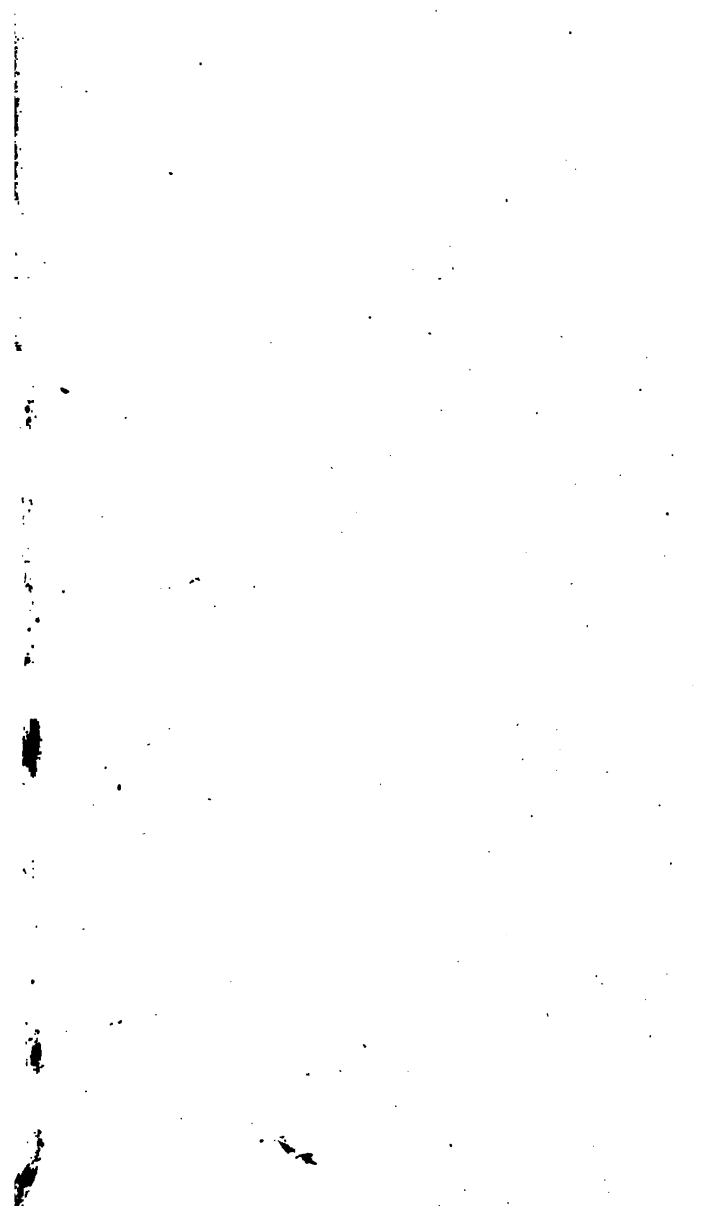
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ALVONDOWN VICARAGE.

A NOVEL.

—(S)—

Lanc, Darling, and Co. Leadenhall-Street.



ALVONDOWN VICARAGE.

A NOVEL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

Distress, associate of all human kind,
In calms we meet thee; meet thee in the wind.
From thy assaults no garrison can shield;
To thy domain must every mortal yield.
Thou visitest where the splendid monarch reigns,
And hauntest the cottager in lonely plains;
No breast so sacred but thy power invades,
And each frail creature thro' thy river wades.
Where from thy arm for refuge shall we fly?
To earth's cold bosom, and you friendly sky!
There no distress the body can annoy,
And there the soul exults in endless joy.



VOL. I.



LONDON:

PRINTED AT THE

Printers,
Pierce, Press,

FOR LANE, NEWMAN, AND CO.

LEADENHALL-STREET.

1807.

249. v. 12.



ALVONDOWN VICARAGE.

CHAP. I.

"Poverty's cold wind, and crushing rain,
Beat keen and heavy on thy tender years;
Oh, let me now into a richer soil
Transplant thee safe, where vernal suns and showers
Diffuse their warmest, largest influence."

THOMSON.

IT was on an evening at the beginning of September, when a strong easterly wind had agitated the sea with convulsive violence, that Lady Elvira Musgrove walked to the drawing-room window of her lodging-house to admire the sublime spectacle.

VOL. I.

B

Lady

Lady Elvira had spent the foregoing three months at Alvondown, an inconsiderable watering-place on the western coast; and she had chosen her lodgings at a house situated on the summit of a high cliff, whose pebbly foot was washed with each returning tide. The most frequented footpath lay immediately under the window, and while Lady Elvira contemplated the fury of contending elements, she was forcibly struck with the interesting figure of a young woman who passed the house. A large straw hat, which she had drawn half over her face, was hardly proof against the storm; but her beautiful flaxen hair, which the wind had disordered, and her expressive countenance, were still visible. She passed Mrs. Ashton, as the latter entered Lady Elvira's habitation.

Mrs. Ashton was an inhabitant of Alvondown; her husband had, during the American war, commanded a privateer, and had, by the plunder of several of the enemy's merchant ships, amassed a competent

petent fortune. Mrs. Ashton was now a widow, and as her money had given her consequence, she thought herself qualified to visit strangers of all ranks, whom pleasure or ill health induced to visit the neighbourhood. She had been very attentive to Lady Elvira, and as the latter sometimes profited by her information, and felt none of that pride which disdains the society of those whose manners have not received the polish of the polite world, she suffered herself to be intruded on.

The compliments of congratulation were now scarcely ended, before she enquired who the sweet girl was that had just passed the house?

"It is Helen Coleby," answered Mrs. Ashton, "one of your proud poor gentlefolks."

"How came she poor?" asked Lady Elvira.

"By inheritance," replied Mrs. Ashton, with a sneer. "Her father was the vicar of this place; he married, and had a large
B 2 family:

family: very luckily for the poor man, however, (for his living was extremely small) his wife and all his children (except his eldest and youngest daughters) died in consumptions. Emily, the eldest, was blessed with a pretty face, of which she had skill enough to make her market. A sober gentleman-like man, very rich, and very prudent, in general, was recommended to this place for the benefit of his health, about fourteen years since. He was quickly captivated with Emily's beauty, and she had, with her father's assistance, art enough to secure the conquest; and poor Mr. Clemments's discretion was duped by their stratagems. He married her, but soon found reason to repent his choice; for Miss's extravagance, or liberal ideas, as she styled them, would soon have reduced him to poverty, had he not checked her proceedings. He returned with her to his former residence, and has, I believe, pretty effectually checked her ostentatious generosity; his chief care has been to prevent

vent her holding correspondence with her own family, who have never seen her since the ceremony was performed."

"Poor victim," said Lady Elvira, "she has severely paid for the sacrifice she made to riches. But how is Helen situated now?"

"Oh, in most sublime poverty," replied Mrs. Ashton. "Her father, who was a gentleman, forsooth, and who, no doubt, imagined that Miss Nelly's charms would prove quite as saleable as her sister's had done, instructed her in all the polite accomplishments. He possessed a competent share of them himself, it seems, though they proved of no great use to him, for nobody thought them worth rewarding by any addition to his income: unluckily his ambitious prospects, with respect to Ellen, were frustrated, for with all his sagacity, he had not skill enough to prevent her from engaging herself to a young man, with whom she had, from childhood,

childhood, been in habits of intimacy. For him it was a most unfortunate attachment, poor young man, for he possessed a handsome person, and talents that might have obtained the hand and fortune of a most accomplished young woman, an heiress, who was very partial to him, had not his predilection in favour of Helen proved a barrier to his advancement. About a year and a half ago, a relation of his, many years resident in the East Indies, sent for him; in consequence of which he departed, and left his heroic favourite to wear the willow, perhaps for ever, since there is little chance of his continuing constant to his little recluse, amidst the variety with which he is likely to be surrounded."

Lady Elvira was so extremely disgusted with the acrimonious manner in which Mrs. Ashton had related the foregoing circumstances, that she felt little inclined to make further enquiries, or to answer what had been already repeated; and Mrs. Ashton,

Ashton, not highly gratified by Lady Elvira's reception of her story, shortly after withdrew.

Lady Elvira's interest for Helen was not at all lessened by the account she had received; it had rather the contrary effect; for aware of the envy that superiority could excite in illiberal minds, she doubted not but such a sensation actuated Mrs. Ashton: she therefore determined to make further enquiries the following morning of Mr. Mallett, the clergyman of the parish, from whom she was assured she should receive an impartial and a rational account.

Helen, unconscious of what had passed, walked to the highest promontory of rocks, from whence the precipice which overhung the sea was tremendous. The waves dashed furiously against its sides, and almost threatened to annihilate its grandeur. On this spot Helen found it impossible to contend with the boisterous winds; she therefore proceeded to a part which, by repeated inundations, had been under-

mined, and was at some places levelled with the beach. A steep and narrow path led to the bottom, which she descended, and found shelter in the hollow of a rock, that the sea had excavated.

"Here," thought she, "I came to take a last look of the ship which conveyed my Courtenay from England! long and hopelessly may I watch for his return!—Eighteen months have elapsed since his departure, and he has never informed me of his existence!—But perhaps all solicitude is useless!—Perhaps he no longer remains an inhabitant of this world!—In this immense abyss he may have found his grave!—Oh, surely if he lived he would not thus cruelly neglect me!"

Helen paused; she feared to investigate too minutely the cause of his silence; the last suggestion was too distressing to be admitted; though rectitude might pronounce it preferable to inconstancy, affection contended that it was less supportable. To cheat for a moment the reality of sorrow,

row, she had recourse to invention, and composed the following lines :

Ye raging winds, whose wild impetuous roar
Drives the swoln surges foaming to the shore,
Suspend your fury, bid the tempest cease,
Still the dread deep, and hush its waves to peace ;
Calm on its surface let mild zephyrs play,
While sheds the sparkling moon her silvery ray :
Ye seas, whose rolling billows wash the sands,
And, ever changing, flow to distant lands,
Say, is my Court'nay safe ?—Oh, ease my fears,
End this suspense, and dry these streaming tears.
Undaunted did his heart thy dangers brave ?
Say, did he 'scape thy yawning, dreadful grave ?
If still he lives, ye gales, my wish obey,
In murm'ring sounds my breathing sighs convey :
And ye wide waters, whose ingulfing tomb
O'erwhelms the mariner, and seals his doom,
Oh bear him gently to his native isle,
And bless poor Helen with her Court'nay's smile.

Though the composition of these lines for
a moment lessened the load of sorrow that
heavily pressed upon her heart, it soon re-

curred to the reality of its feelings, and she returned, dispirited, to her humble habitation.

The following morning, at rather an earlier hour than people of Lady Elvira's rank are accustomed to pay visits, she called on Mr. Mallett, and after a few preparatory remarks, enquired if he could give her any account of Miss Coleby, whose appearance had created a strong interest in her favour the preceding evening?

"If your Ladyship has been attracted by Helen's appearance," replied Mr. Mallett, "I am happy to say that an acquaintance with her character will be far from lessening the favourable impression. Few young women can boast of so many important virtues as she possesses; but, poor girl, it has of late been her lot to struggle with misfortune. Though so young, she has been severely disciplined in the rugged school of adversity. Her father was a worthy man, but it was likewise his lot to drink deeply of the bitter cup. His wife and six children died in consumptions; his
eldest

eldest daughter, an amiable and beautiful young woman, seemed the only comfort left him. Helen was too young to be sensible of his affliction. Of fortune's favours he had never very liberally partaken, His living was small, and his private possessions did not much encrease his income : but, notwithstanding his embarrassed circumstances, he contrived to be charitable, and there was not a poor family in the neighbourhood but had been benefited by some act of his kindness."

"How long has he been dead?" asked Lady Elvira.

"About sixteen months," answered Mr. Mallett; "the expences of his family during their long illness had so deeply involved him in debt, that the utmost frugality could accumulate but a moderate sufficiency for his poor Helen, and of this sum she was deprived by the treachery of her agent. She now resides with an old servant in this village, till she can hear of some eligible situation in which she can earn a
n 6 subsistence."

subsistence. To be governess in a private family seems her favourite wish, and she is well qualified for the undertaking; but I fear there are humiliations attached to such a station, that will be severely felt by a mind so full of sensibility."

"She shall not be put to the test," said Lady Elvira, while a tear started from her eye: "you, Sir, are, I doubt not, her friend—shall I request you to introduce me to the youthful sorrower?—Your recommendation is sufficiently powerful, and I shall rejoice at an opportunity of restoring so amiable a member to society."

"Heaven crown your generous intentions with success," exclaimed Mr. Mallett, with energy; "I will, with pleasure, repeat them to my young friend, and this afternoon you shall, as far as a first introduction can determine, judge of her deserts."

"It was agreed that Lady Elvira should meet Helen at the Vicarage."

CHAP. II.

“To cram the rich was prodigal expence,
And who would take the poor from Providence?”

POPE.

HELEN, who foresaw not the favourable change in her circumstances, so likely to take place, retired dejectedly to bed. Mr. Mallett, now her only friend, had undertaken to procure for her some occupation; by which she might be enabled to support herself; for the present she was supported by him. Such a state of dependance was extremely irksome to her feelings, and she thought him tardy in relieving it; but how could she condemn so generous a friend, whose

whose negligence was only a tax on his own bounty?—"He is my best and only friend now," thought she; "my sister does not admit my claims to her fraternal affection; but though she is constrained to be silent, I am sure her gentle bosom bleeds for my unprotected situation. Yes, my Emily cannot have sacrificed her sensibility to her tyrannical husband, though she has her peace."

This conclusion was too just: at an early age did poor Emily's charms subdue the flinty heart of a miser; it was the only amiable impression he ever felt, and happy would it have been for her had it then been steel'd with its usual obduracy. He was aware that Emily could inherit no fortune, and for a long time he endeavoured to conquer his partiality; but at length recollecting that if she did not encrease his riches, it was very probable, from the economical manner in which she had been educated, that she would adopt his frugal sentiments, and assist his wishes, he yielded
to

to the tender impression, and for once disguised his penurious principles under the semblance of uncommon liberality. Mr. Coleby was deceived, and at the altar he presented Mr. Clemments with his then blooming and happy Emily.

Mr. Clemments was not long in delineating his character; he carried her to his former residence, in a country town about fifty miles from Alvondown. The gloomy appearance of the habitation, and of the solitary domestic that welcomed their arrival, did not impress her with the most lively ideas. Every apartment in the house evinced the same comfortless and dreary aspect; but Emily's hope of domestic comfort was sanguine, and she checked every discontented idea which the half-furnished mansion was calculated to inspire.

For some weeks Mr. Clemments was tolerably liberal in his household arrangements; and though his understanding did not quite reach the perfection to which
her

her romantic ideas of a husband had formerly aspired, she believed that she should always love and respect the man who had paid her the compliment of preferring her to every other woman. But though she felt happy in the society of her husband, she wondered that she enjoyed it so exclusively. There were several respectable families in the town where she lived, and its vicinity, and it excited some surprise that not one of them had paid her the compliment of a visit. She at length expressed her sentiments on the subject, when Mr. Clemments effectually silenced her, by saying he thought she possessed sufficient sense to be aware of the expence of visiting, which was only requisite to fill the vacancy of a weak mind, devoid of all internal resources.

Emily felt hurt at the answer; she did not deserve to be accused of extravagance, and Mr. Clemments surely could not be so illiberal as to exclude himself from all society, to avoid the trifling expence attending

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ing it; but not accustomed to look abroad for resources, she found them within herself. The loss of her father's instructive and affectionate conversation, indeed, for which her husband was but a poor substitute, was soon most severely felt; but she never permitted herself to draw comparisons, till a harsh reprimand from her husband, in consequence of a liberal benefaction which she had bestowed on a distressed and worthy object, induced her to do so; it was, however, vain to contend, and she soled her feelings, in some measure, by anticipating a visit to her father the ensuing summer, which, on their marriage, Mr. Clemments had faithfully promised, and of which Mr. Coleby took sufficient care to remind him.

The time at length approached, and Emily ventured to express her hopes that he would name a day for their departure. The proposal occasioned a vacant stare, and at length an enquiry of what journey she wished to undertake?

Surprise

Surprise for some time prevented her from naming her wish to visit her father.

"Visit your father!" repeated Mr. Clemments, "why surely you are dreaming!—Can you possibly believe that at this expensive season I will run into such extravagance?—How do you imagine we are to be conveyed to such a distant place?—Two horses will be absolutely necessary for the purpose, and do you consider what their hire and provender will cost?—We must sleep a night on the road; and besides you are but a poor rider—you may therefore be thrown, or the unusual exercise may produce a fever; and if either of these disasters should happen, and you be confined at an inn, think what additional expence and trouble it will create: but granting that we arrive in safety, we shall only get a month's maintenance; and by the time we have paid horse-hire and travelling expences, and allowed our servant a shilling a-week board wages, what do you think we shall get by it?—No, no, do not
set

set your heart on any such idle chimeras. I dare say your father and sister are well ; and if not, I do not see how our presence can afford them any relief."

Emily was too much shocked at his brutal ideas to answer them ; and he, well pleased that his arguments had convinced her of the impropriety of her request, left the room, perfectly satisfied with the effect of his eloquence.

In vain did Emily repine at the severity of her lot—it was now irrevocable ; resignation was, therefore, the only virtue she had an opportunity of practising ; and this it was still more necessary to exercise, when, a few months after, he prohibited a correspondence with her father, alledging that postage was an expensive article, and he did not see what use it could be of to write, when there was so little probability of their ever meeting ; it was at best but tantalizing each other with vain hopes and wishes ; and if Mr. Coleby, or his youngest daughter, was ill, the account would only
be

be productive of unnecessary pain; whereas while she remained ignorant of their sufferings, her sensibility would be spared.

Against this unnatural estrangement from her family, Emily ventured to remonstrate, and even offered to deny herself some of the necessaries of life, to compensate for the expence of the correspondence; but to this proposition he resolutely objected.— He doubted not but she would half starve herself, for the sake of receiving a nonsensical sheet of paper now and then; but if she dieted herself into a disorder, it must be cured at his expence; and he thought it rather more œconomical to pay the cook than the doctor.

Thus debarred the soothing intercourse of affection and friendship, Emily resigned herself, with all the patience she could exert, to the misery of her situation; and time and habit rendered her at length more callous to the effects.

Fourteen years had now elapsed since
her

her fate had been thus decided; and except a few letters that were exchanged in consequence of her father's death, she had held no correspondence with Helen. The known embarrassment of her father's circumstances made her heart bleed for the helpless situation of her orphan sister.—With what pleasure would she have shielded her from all the adverse storms with which fate cruelly buffeted her!—but her wishes, she well knew, were vain; she therefore forbore to express them.

By Helen the loss of her sister's society had never been severely felt; she was but five years old at the time Emily left Alvondown, and she was then too young to know her worth. She loved her with infantine affection, and recollected that she wept as if her heart would break when she received her last embrace, and saw her drive off in a carriage with Mr. Clemments; but though the impression was deeply engraven on her memory, it soon lost its effect on her feelings, for her affection
found

found a substitute in Percival Courtenay, a child four years older than herself, whom her father constantly instructed, and almost adopted.

To Mr. Coleby, indeed, was Percival indebted for his education ; his father was what the world terms an easy good-tempered fellow, ever ready to accommodate himself to his associates, and to adopt their manners and opinions. He was left a widower with one son : while his wife lived, he had resided at Alvondown ; he did not altogether relish so recluse a situation, but as his wife preferred it, he readily complied with her wishes. It was his intention to continue there after her decease, but a few letters from the jovial companions with whom he had formerly lived in habits of intimacy, conquered his resolution, and he returned to London, from whence he paid occasional visits to his son and Sophia Cremur, who were left at Alvondown.

Miss Cremur was an heiress ; her mother had been related to Mrs. Courtenay, and

to her she entrusted her orphan daughter when she died. Mr. Courtenay, together with a man of great respectability, were her guardians. Sophia was sent to school soon after Mrs. Courtenay's decease ; and as her other guardian was unmarried, she was not permitted to quit the seminary till she had attained her seventeenth year, when her education was deemed compleat, and Mr. Courtenay thought it requisite to return to Alvondown, to receive her at his house.

Percival was two years older than Sophia, and as his father's ward and guest, he now thought it incumbent to pay her every attention in his power. To his native politeness and good humour was she indebted for his civility, for her manners possessed no charm to interest him ; indeed, he considered her an insipid little girl, totally devoid of every quality, which, in his romantic ideas, constituted female excellence.— But perhaps he was not a correct judge, for he had long exchanged his heart for
one

one that, in his partial opinion, nearly approached perfection.

Compassion for his deserted situation induced Mr. Coleby to receive him as a constant visitor; the boy soon stole a share of his affection, and finding him almost totally neglected by his father, he became his tutor.

Mr. Courtenay was pleased with the circumstance, and well knowing that Mr. Coleby would not be urgent for pecuniary recompence, he prevailed on the former to take the entire charge of his son's education and promised to pay whatever he should demand for his trouble. Many circumstances led Mr. Coleby to fear that he was living an extravagant life, and that his affairs were greatly deranged; such a supposition, however, so far from lessening his attention to Percival, induced him to be more diligent in his instructions. He was soon sufficiently repaid by the quick comprehension and amiable disposition of his pupil.

Percival

Percival was not long insensible to his father's unkind neglect, and though he avoided drawing comparisons to the disadvantage of his natural parent, the idea never suggested itself, without encreasing his affection and veneration for Mr. Coleby.

Helen was the daughter of his benefactor; she was, therefore, entitled to his warmest friendship; not indeed that such an incitement was required to gain his affection, for the natural suavity of her disposition was sufficiently magnetic.—While Percival was her father's pupil, she became his. He was her superior both in age and learning, and she received instruction from him with even more pleasure than from her father. Thus, from her earliest childhood, was she accustomed to adopt his sentiments; no action of her life was concealed from him; nor did she (while under his tuition) ever venture to decide on any subject without consulting his judgment.

So situated, it was natural that the similarity of their pursuits should attach them to each other. Sophia's presence at Alvondown was an interruption to their happiness; she could not share their studies, nor could she receive pleasure from their amusements; she therefore preferred the society of Miss Ashton, whose ideas were more congenial with her own.

In her young days Miss Ashton had naturally imbibed her mother's asperity, and believed all her uncharitable decisions correct; she therefore easily persuaded Sophia that Helen Coleby was a mere country girl, who had seen nothing of the world, and totally destitute of every advantage which education could bestow. In the latter respect she was, however, deceived; Mr. Coleby had received both a classical and an elegant education; he was therefore qualified to impart to his pupil and daughter all the graces of exterior accomplishments. Music and drawing were the occupations of his leisure hours,

hours, and he derived additional pleasure from the proficiency of his pupils in these his favourite amusements. But with respect to their knowledge on any subject, Miss Ashton was wholly unacquainted ; her mother had made more than one overture to be on terms of intimacy with Mr. Coleby, while she saw him caressed by people whose superiority of situation made her ambitious of their acquaintance ; but finding herself neglected, and, as she feared, despised, she gave up the attempt, and solaced herself by bestowing on his family all the abuse that her rancorous heart dictated. Sophia was therefore strongly prejudiced against Helen from childhood ; and it was no small mortification to her to hear, that this ignorant girl had so compleatly rivalled her in the affection of Percival Courtenay, whom she meant to honour with a large share of her regard. It was not that she really felt a disinterested affection for him, but having, with some of her elder schoolfellows,

dwelt much on the passion of love, and having for the last two years of her stay at school, been anxiously wishing for a trip to Gretna Green with some captivating swain, she felt herself perfectly disposed to fall violently in love with her guardian's son, to whom, she doubted not, the charms of her person and fortune would prove sufficiently attractive to detach him from Helen, for whom she believed his partiality proceeded more from habit than inclination. Another principal inducement to her plan was the sweet gratification of exciting envy in all her young companions, by becoming a matron before them; and unfortunately for Percival, he was the only youth with whom she was acquainted.

CHAP. III.

" ————— She!

Oh name her not ! were I this moment free,
And disengag'd as he who never felt
The pow'ful eye of beauty, never sigh'd
For matchless worth like thine, I should abhor
All thoughts of that alliance."

THOMSON.

WITH the laudable intention of depriving Helen of her innocent happiness, Miss Cremur bade a final adieu to all her schoolfellows, and returned to Alvondown, armed for conquest. Her intention was communicated to her confidant, Harriet Ashton, who generously offered her assistance.

Miss Ashton had once encouraged hopes of laying siege to the heart of Percival in her own behalf, but finding every effort unsuccessful, she at length relinquished the design ; and as Alvondown neither abounded with beaux nor adventures, she flew for consolation to the shelves of the circulating library. After perusing all the novels it contained, and possessing but faint hopes of ever being herself an heroine, she began to fancy she might render herself equally celebrated by becoming an authoress ; in poetry she determined to excel. The first efforts of her muse were not, indeed, very promising, but she flattered herself that riper age would mature her judgment. The disappointed loves of Percival and Helen, she hoped would furnish a copious subject ; she therefore anxiously prayed that her friend's efforts to separate them might be realized. The first step towards the accomplishment of their purpose, was to prejudice Mr. Courtenay against the Colebys, who, they told him, had used every

every art to ensnare his son, and to make him the husband of Helen.

Mr. Courtenay was, indeed, perfectly indifferent with respect to the future destination of Percival, but when he recollected his own embarrassed circumstances, he felt the impropriety of his forming such a connection ; and all the resentment which his sluggish nature was capable of feeling, was excited against his worthy friend.

Ignorant of all that had been invented to his disadvantage, Mr. Coleby paid a visit to Mr. Courtenay, and represented to him the necessity of deciding on the profession for which his son was to be qualified ; he had nearly attained his nineteenth year, and it was surely high time that he should change the recluse and inactive life he had hitherto led, for something more useful and respectable ; for, notwithstanding all his virtuous propensities, Mr. Coleby dreaded the effect of such entire indolence.

Percival had himself been long anxious to act his part in the more busy scenes of life, which was an additional motive with Mr. Coleby to urge his claims on his father.

When Mr. Coleby was announced, it was Mr. Courtenay's intention to receive him very cavalierly, and to reproach him with the duplicity of which Mrs. Ashton had accused him; but the presence and conversation of the venerable man dispelled every atom of resentment, and he acknowledged the justice of his remarks.—He thanked him for the attention he had paid his son, and promised shortly to look out for some situation for him.

This was a promise which Mr. Coleby had great reason to fear would never be fulfilled, for the requisite sum was wanting. Mr. Courtenay had no chance of possessing it, but he was ashamed to confess his poverty.

Sophia now resided entirely with the Ashtons; she had, with Harriet, been anxiously waiting the result of this visit; they

they had hoped that a violent quarrel would be the consequence, and that Percival's visits to the Vicarage would be finally prohibited; they were, therefore, severely disappointed to find that the gentlemen had parted on pacific terms. To compleat their chagrin, Percival's indifference for Sophia seemed to increase; and as she was no longer an inhabitant of his father's house, he considered himself relieved from the irksome duty of paying her attention. His visits to the Vicarage were renewed, where, as before Miss Cremur's arrival, he again spent the whole of his time.

Sophia's love was not of that delicate kind that can alone receive pleasure from the mutual affection and happiness of its object; she could not, therefore, prevail on herself to relinquish the hope of one day possessing his hand, however his heart might be disposed of. After various consultations on the subject with Mrs. and Miss Ashton, they agreed to disclose the

secret of Sophia's love to old Mr. Courtenay, and to solicit his consent and assistance.— They hoped the prospect of sharing her fortune might, in some degree, conquer his natural imbecility.

Mrs. Ashton accordingly waited on him, and after expressing the warmest interest for the dear orphan whom she had so long known and loved, she declared that she considered it ~~her~~ duty to disclose the secret to him, on which the beloved girl's future happiness seemed wholly to depend. It was certainly a delicate subject, but when so much was at stake, she could not be silent; and as she believed his influence might have some effect towards the accomplishment of her wishes, she would rely on his generosity and discretion never to breathe a syllable of what she was about to reveal: after which preface, she confessed to him Sophia's partiality for his son, which she declared to be of the most noble and disinterested kind.

Mr. Courtenay was most agreeably surprised

prised at this piece of intelligence; it surpassed his most sanguine expectations. He had, indeed, long wished that Percival could be united to Miss Cremur, but he could, by no means, devise a plan by which such a wish might be accomplished; he was, therefore, as highly delighted as his sluggish temper would permit, when thus apprised of her favourable sentiments, and he embraced the earliest opportunity of repeating them to his son.

Percival was more surprised than flattered by the account; had he not been attached to Helen, he would have found it impossible to love Miss Cremur; and such extreme forwardness, as the confession of her partiality for him evinced, was, by no means, likely to encrease his esteem; he, therefore, without hesitation, rejected the proposal, and candidly confessed to whom his heart was attached.

Mr. Courtenay had promised Mrs. Ashton to command his son peremptorily to profess himself Miss Cremur's lover, and

had, at the time, really intended to enforce obedience ; but Percival's reasonable and dutiful language softened his austerity, and he only expressed his fears that a connection with Helen would be very imprudent.

"Surely, Sir," replied Percival, "a connection with the family of my best friend cannot be deemed imprudent."

Percival did not mean to reflect on his father by this answer, but his zeal for Mr. Coleby and Helen threw him off his guard. Mr. Courtenay felt the reproof, and internally acknowledged its justice ; he returned no answer ; and after a few remarks on indifferent subjects, Percival departed, contenting himself with his father's tacit approbation of his choice.

Mr. Courtenay intended to quit Alvondown in the course of a few days ; and now dreading the satire of Mrs. Ashton, who, he well knew, would accuse him of imbecility, he took a hasty departure, without the ceremony

remony of bidding adieu to his ward, or her friends.

The ladies were greatly surprised and disappointed at his unaccountable conduct, and most anxiously wished to know what had passed between him and Percival ; but it was now impossible : conjecture, therefore, was busy in attempting to devise the cause of his sudden journey. Neither Sophia nor her friend would allow themselves to suppose that Percival could reject the generous offer ; the former, therefore, endeavoured to persuade herself that her guardian was gone to London to adjust matters for the ceremony ; she accordingly adorned herself with all becoming grace, to receive her grateful and admiring swain.

Harriet was so deeply engaged in an unsuccessful attempt to compose a congratulatory address, which she meant to repeat to her friend as an impromptu, after Percival's first visit, that she quite forgot the possibility of his neglecting to make it.

Totally indifferent to what occupied the
5 minds

minds of those ladies, Percival returned to Mr. Coleby's, elated with the success of his confession to his father, in favour of Helen. Never, indeed, had an engagement been formed between them, for she constantly referred him to her father; and Percival, perfectly aware of the answer he should receive, had neglected to make the application; now, however, no obstacle intervened, and he immediately sought Mr. Coleby, to whom he repeated his father's acquiescence.

Mr. Coleby could not be ignorant of the attachment that subsisted between Percival and his daughter, and as he saw no objection on either side to the connection, he used no efforts to check its progress. Neither the prospects of Percival nor his daughter were very promising; from every account of Mr. Courtenay's present style of living, it was improbable that any part of his property would remain for his son; the latter had, therefore, nothing to depend on but his own exertions.

A father.

A father who had shewn so little parental affection could certainly claim no right to the disposal of his child in marriage; but though Mr. Coleby would, in Percival's behalf, have resisted any coercive measures used by his father to effect such a purpose, he would never have consented to his forming an engagement without his sanction. He knew Mr. Courtenay too well indeed to fear an objection from him on the present occasion; and as he thought no stimulus so strong to a youthful mind, as an assurance that the happiness of a beloved object depended on its industrious exertions, he was pleased at discovering Percival's partial opinion of Helen. On her own account he was still more gratified; Mr. Clemments had sufficiently convinced him how incompetent riches were to secure happiness; on the innate riches, therefore, of a liberal and virtuous mind, he rested his Helen's prospect of felicity.

But it was now high time that some situation.

tuation should be procured for Percival, and Mr. Coleby wrote to remind his father of the urgency of his claims.

Severe in the extreme was the disappointment of Sophia and her friend at the continued invariable neglect of Percival; they had dwelt so anxiously on the accomplishment of their plan, that they persuaded each other it was impossible it should fail; experience, however, convinced them that the invaluable prize had been held too cheap, and that it was rejected by the vile reptile to whom it had been so generously offered.

Harriet, indeed, found some portion of consolation on the trying occasion, from the expected assistance of her muse; vainly had she courted her favour to dictate a poetical composition, expressive of the virtues and sorrows of the lovers, whom she was taking such pains to separate; but as she could not succeed, she flattered herself that the hopeless love of Sophia might furnish a subject on which
her

her talents might shine more conspicuously.

Mrs. Ashton, whose knowledge of the human heart was more matured than that of her daughter or friend, had not been so sanguine in her expectations respecting the success of their scheme ; she foresaw many obstacles, which, however, she despaired not of conquering by her artifices. She was neither surprised nor discouraged at Percival's present behaviour, but determined to watch, with unwearied vigilance, for a favourable opportunity of putting her plan in execution.



CHAP. IV.

"Ah me ! how oft will fancy's spells, in slumber,
Recall my native country to my mind !
How oft regret will bid me sadly number
Each lost delight and dear friend left behind !"

LEWIS.

THUS passed two years, when Mr. Coleby, who felt his health decline, became more importunate with Percival's father to procure for him a situation. He wrote to him, and represented in strong terms the ill consequences, as well as guilt, of thus abandoning his child—a child, too, whom every other parent would be proud to acknowledge, and anxious to place in such

such a station as would exercise and improve the superior abilities with which nature had liberally furnished him, but whom he condemned to the most disgraceful and dangerous state of inanity.

“ With Percival’s warm feelings,” proceeded he, “ I should scarcely be surprised at any excesses into which he might be hurried ; he is, by nature, ill calculated for an inactive life ; nor have I been deficient in encouraging his propensity to industry. What then have you to answer for, in withholding the means by which his mind (ardent and enterprising) would pursue with vigour whatever path parental affection should dictate ; and how are you sure, that by thus repressing every expectation which his fervid imagination may form, you may not pervert the current, and turn it into that channel which terminates in ruin and despair ?—and how would you silence the reproaches of conscience, if that son, whose heart is now the seat of every virtue, should become hardened

ened in guilt, and should, when summoned to make atonement for his crimes, curse his parent as the author of his disgrace and misery?—Whatever infamy his conduct may bring on your name, the world will impute to your shameful negligence. But should his growing virtues mature, and be one day rewarded, that honest pride which would fill the breast of every other parent, you would be excluded from; the time may come when the affection and support of a son may be wanting—could you then apply to Percival?—could you receive benefits from him, without recollecting how little you are entitled to them? Since I have entered on this subject, allow me to admonish you, in the language of friendly sincerity: you are now arrived at an age when the follies of youth are not only unbecoming, but wholly inexcusable. What consolation does the retrospect of your past life afford you?—Perhaps you have never dwelt on the subject; but let me remind you that it is a necessary one. I am
not

not many years your senior, and yet I sensibly feel the gradual decay of all my mental faculties; I am convinced that my race is nearly run; it may be your lot to survive me, but if it should, what will be the solace of your age, the recompence of your labours?—but I forbear; the serious and melancholy reflections that crowd on my heart will be but indifferently received in the circle of festivity; I am sufficiently aware of the inefficacy of those I have already expressed, but the occasion demands them; I plead the cause of injured innocence; if you reject its claims, may your own conscience prove your accuser and judge.”

This language was perfectly unexpected by Mr. Courtenay, and he determined to resent its freedom; a second perusal, however, calmed his passion. He felt its justice, and reproached himself with even more asperity than Mr. Coleby had done; and conscious of his own imbecility, he determined to delay no time in seeking the situation

situation so urgently demanded. He now seemed, for the first time, to recollect a proposal made him about five years before, from a relation who held an important office under the Governor-General of Bengal, to provide for Percival, if his father would send him abroad; but finding it inconvenient to raise the sum requisite for his equipment, he had never even mentioned it to his son; but it was now the only plan that suggested itself to his imagination. He was, indeed, much more deficient in cash than he had been five years before, nor did he know that his relation retained the inclination or ability to provide for Percival; he was not even assured of his existence. In spite, however, of all those formidable impediments, Mr. Coleby, to his utter astonishment, received an answer to his letter in less than a fortnight, in which Percival was requested to hasten to London, that he might be equipped as soon as possible for a voyage to the Indies.

Long

Long and anxiously as Percival had wished to act his part on the busy theatre of life, the mandate that was so suddenly to tear him from all his heart held dear, was a severe shock to his feelings. Mr. Coleby made no comments on the subject, but went with his young friend to bespeak a passage in a vessel bound from Alvondown to London, which was to sail the following day.

The matter was easily settled, and Percival had nothing to do but prepare for his voyage, and bid adieu to his beloved friends. This was indeed a heart-breaking task; from his Helen he had never been absent since they became dear to each other; how then should they endure the long, long separation that now approached! —It was a melancholy day to all; he was to depart at six the following morning.

Mr. Coleby was now become too infirm to leave his bed at so early an hour; Percival, therefore, went to his chamber, where he received his last affectionate embrace in
silence;

silence ; that they should meet no more in this world was too sensibly felt by both.

Helen arose, to accompany Percival to the last rock from whence he was to descend to the boat ; it was a walk they had often taken together, but never with the sensations they now experienced. Percival wished to strengthen her mind, but he had proceeded half the way before he could speak to her. " Indeed, my Helen," he at length said, " we must acquire more fortitude ; it is not for ever that I now quit you. In what a torpid indolent state have my youthful days been spent !—I am ashamed to recollect the inutility of my past life ; my future exertions shall, I trust, in some degree, repair the loss. Can I ever forget that this dear hand is to be my reward ?—Yes, Helen, it shall be the business, the glory of my life, to deserve you ! Fortune will, I sanguinely hope, favour my designs ; and who knows," added he, with a smile, " but I may return ornamented with all the trappings of eastern magnificence

cence to claim you. In the mean time, I leave you secure in innocence, and protected by Heaven and your father."

He would have proceeded, but his emotion almost choked him, and to conceal his weakness, he pressed her to his heart, imprinted the parting kiss, and hastened down the path that led to the beach. A mist before her eyes for some time obscured him from her view; she at length descried him seated in the boat; he waved his handkerchief—it was his last signal, she returned it, and sorrowfully departed.

The morning was fine, and the level surface of the water reflected the mild beams of the rising sun. Every object looked cheerful; the bathing women were busy with their machines, and the company began to assemble to reward their labours. Miss Ashton and Miss Cremur were among the number; they stopped, and accosted her with unusual civility. That they enjoyed her distress, she was well assured; she felt, therefore, but little inclined to accept their compliments.

CHAP. V.

“ The orphan mark’d the ardour of his eye,
Bless’d his kind words, and thank’d him with a sigh.”

BLOOMFIELD.

SEVERELY indeed was the loss of Percival’s society felt by his young friend, particularly as her father’s health so rapidly declined, as to require all her anxious attention. Her efforts to restore him were ineffectual, and in less than two months after the departure of Percival, she mourned the loss of her respected and beloved parent.

Mr. Mallett, who was appointed his successor, had long been his friend, and as soon as he was apprized of the melancholy event, he hastened to Alvondown,
to

to assist Helen, whose friendless situation he knew and deplored. With sorrow he found that her father's effects were trifling, scarcely more than sufficient to defray the expences of his funeral. Could Mr. Coleby have foreseen this circumstance, he would, probably, have provided against its effects, by placing Helen in a situation where she might, by industry, have procured a livelihood; but his œconomy had amassed for her a small sum, which a few days only before he died, he placed in the hands of a banker, to be vested for her in the funds. This man, however, whose affairs were in the most deranged state when he received the money, applied it to his own use, absconded, and was declared bankrupt.

This was a severe and unexpected stroke; Mr. Mallett feelingly lamented it; willingly would he have repaired the loss, had he the means, but inheriting no private fortune, he had found the narrow income of a curacy but barely sufficient to support the appearance of a gentleman. The small
D 2 living

living of Alvondown was all the reward that his merit and superior talents were ever likely to obtain; it was, therefore, impossible for him to screen his young friend from the misery of dependence. Nothing within his power did he, however, leave unaccomplished; he paid all her debts, which were trifling, and told her that the tythes due in arrears to her father would support her comfortably, till some eligible situation could be procured.

The generous delicacy of his friendship awakened the most lively gratitude in her heart; it was impossible to express her feelings, but her countenance sufficiently evinced them.

He requested her to occupy her usual apartments at the Vicarage, but she declined the invitation. Mr. Mallett was an unmarried man, and she well knew that neither his age nor virtues would sanction her deviation from the strictest rules of decorum; she therefore hired obscure apartments at the house of an old woman who had nursed her.

With

With undissembled pleasure did Mrs. Ashton's circle behold the mournful change in Helen's circumstances. She could be no longer an object of envy, for she was now an orphan, deprived of her patrimony. But unfortunate as she was, their malignity was not wholly gratified; they could have wished her to inhabit the Vicarage; for on such a circumstance they might have invented a tale of scandal, which they hoped would have blasted her only remaining gleam of comfort—that of possessing the heart of Courtenay. Could they have known her feelings on the subject, perhaps their malice might have been satisfied, for since his departure from England, she had never heard from him. Before he quitted his native land, his letters breathed the same affectionate language that his lips had ever done; but from the moment of his embarkation, to the day on which her appearance had so warmly interested Lady Elvira Musgrove, she was ignorant of his fate.

Mr. Mallett was anxious to visit Helen after his interview with Lady Elvira, and as soon as the latter had quitted the Vicarage, he walked to Helen's cottage. On her mind the sorrowful reflections of the preceding evening had thrown a more than usually sombre hue, and she appeared dejected. Mr. Mallett's presence, however, always a source of comfort, had now its usual effect, and she welcomed him with the respect and affection to which he was so justly entitled.

It was not his wish to deprive her conversation of its natural artless charms, which he was aware the avowal of Lady Elvira's favourable sentiments, and the declared purpose for which she was to meet her, would have done; he therefore only requested her to spend the day with him, without assigning any particular reason for the invitation, which she, with pleasure, accepted, and was in a few minutes ready to accompany him.

"All your kind exertions to procure
some

some employment for me, Sir," said she, as they proceeded, "will, I fear, prove unsuccessful; indeed you are too indulgent to me—I have no right to be particular in my choice of a situation; some disagreeable circumstances I am assured must occur wherever I am placed; but I think I can endure them with tolerable fortitude; and believe me, Sir, it is most painful to my feelings to continue thus, an idle intruder on your generosity, to which I have no claim, but from the benevolence of your heart."

"Is what you consider an obligation to me so very irksome to your feelings, Helen?" he asked; "I should be sorry to accuse you of pride, but I know not to what other cause I can impute your uneasiness. How would you feel were the case reversed?—You know the extent of my income; suppose, then, you possessed it, and a friend for whom you felt as much regard as, I flatter myself, you do for me, were distressed, and wanted the means of
D 4 subsistence,

subsistence, would you consider such a friend an idle intruder on your bounty?"

"Oh no, Sir," she replied, "I am sure you do not suspect me of such selfish obduracy; but may not a small portion of that pride be allowable, which would rather confer an obligation than receive one?"

"In the present instance, I decidedly answer no," returned Mr. Mallett; "we are to appreciate the feelings of others by our own; and if we find it so very painful to accept favours, how can we derive pleasure from exciting those unpleasant sensations in the bosom of another? Thus, by pursuing the argument, we may persuade ourselves that no donations can be beneficial, and that it is cruel to relieve the distressed, since by so doing we only consult our own gratification, without considering the pain we inflict."

"That you are right, Sir," replied Helen, "I certainly believe; and though," she added, with a smile, "I must be allowed, in favour of my opinion, that partiality may
a little

a little wrest your judgment, I will endeavour to correct the pride of which you accuse me, and of which I was till this moment unconscious. But is not there a contrary extreme?—and do you not consider ingratitude a greater fault than pride?”

“Pride is ever ungrateful,” said Mr. Mallett; “but this is foreign to our argument, my dear, which relates to those only who are possessed of sensibility and worth. An unfeeling man may be proud, and he may be ungrateful from his apathy; and here, you will say, we may safely bestow favours, since you are assured they will not be received with pain or reluctance: but though it is our duty to relieve the indigent, as far as we possess the means, I believe there are few who would not rather bestow benefits on those who can feel the obligation. There is, I confess, a great degree of selfishness in the distinction; but in its vindication, I must remark that we certainly do not consider gratitude a pain-

ful sensation. If you recollect, Addison, in one of his Spectators, says, that where he meets with a grateful poor man, he always concludes that he would be a very liberal rich one: this is placing gratitude in a most amiable point of view, and surely no amiable quality can be productive of pain. Thus then, my Helen," he added with a smile, "though I am sorry for the conclusion, I must impute your present uneasiness more to pride than gratitude; do not, therefore, mortify me again by a similar complaint. I have not, however, forgotten the necessity of finding for you a different situation, and do not doubt of having it very soon in my power to comply with your wishes."

Helen thanked him with warmth for the generous interest he had expressed and shewn in her favour, and promised never again to wound his feelings by her impatience.

In the afternoon Lady Elvira was true to her appointment with Mr. Mallett, and the
favourable

favourable impression which Helen's first appearance had created, was so much increased, that she requested to be favoured with a visit from her the following day.

Helen's heart beat high with hope as she returned to her cottage. "Could I render myself useful to such a woman as Lady Elvira Musgrove," thought she, "how enviable would be my lot!—Under her protection I must be happy, for she is gentle and good; but the wish is too presumptuous, nor will I, by its indulgence, abridge the pleasures of my present situation."

Helen forgot that appearances too often deceive, and that those whose attractions are most conspicuous at first, frequently want power or inclination to continue the favourable impression. In the present instance, however, her decision was correct; Lady Elvira's pleasing manners were not deceitful: her fortune was not so liberal as her heart, but it was at her own disposal, and she frequently debarred herself the
D 6 luxuries

luxuries of life (though by some entitled necessities), to bestow comforts on those whose circumstances were too limited to afford them.

Helen was too punctual to her appointment, for ignorant of the fashionable hours of visiting, she found that her Ladyship had just retired to dress for dinner. A message, however, as soon as she knew that Helen was in the house, requested her company in the dressing-room.

"You see, my dear Miss Coleby," said she, when Helen entered, "that I already take the liberty of ranking you among the number of my friends; can you forgive this freedom in a new acquaintance?"

"Indeed, Madam," she replied, "I feel grateful, and proud of the flattering distinction."

"Will you, then, do me the favour of spending half an hour with me here?" said Lady Elvira. "Barnard," addressing her woman, "you may retire; I shall not require your assistance; and be sure to give orders

orders that I am not at home to any visitors that may chuse to favour me with a call this morning."

Helen smiled.

"You are as yet," said Lady Elvira, "a stranger to the deceit which we poor unfortunate inhabitants of the visiting world are obliged to practise. In the present instance, however, I think you will allow it to be excuseable, since it is the only possible means of rescuing ourselves from a constant succession of tiresome insipidity. Fashion sends people to watering-places, but fashion cannot always furnish scenes of amusement; and there are many hours when its weary votaries can find no other method of killing that inexorable enemy, time, than by intruding on their acquaintance, whom they contrive to make more sick of them, if possible, than they are of themselves."

Helen could scarcely believe it possible for people to find time a burthen; for her own part, she had never passed an hour unemployed;

unemployed ; and she was sufficiently convinced that industry was its own reward, to believe that no individual could be ignorant of so important a truth.

“ But this is not a preface likely to plead much in favour of the proposal I am going to make you,” said Lady Elvira ; “ would it not be both selfish and malicious (after what I have just said) to request you to become my guest when I leave this place, and to spend the ensuing winter among those vacant loungers at Bath ? ”

Helen felt startled and confused at this unexpected invitation, and she knew not what to reply. Had she been at her own cottage, free from the restraint that Lady Elvira’s presence created, she would have found it easy to have given a proper answer ; but her diffidence was most distressing ; she blushed, and answered, with evident hesitation, that she thanked her Ladyship for the superlative honour she intended her.

“ I see you are afraid of sudden attachments,”

ments," said Lady Elvira, with a smile; "we will therefore decline the subject till you know me better, when I trust I shall not forfeit my claim to your friendship."

"Pardon me, my Lady," said Helen, who could not endure to be suspected of caution respecting her attachment to Lady Elvira, "it is not the fear of accepting your offered kindness till I am better acquainted with you, but the conviction of my own unworthiness that confuses me; if your generosity can trust appearances, and receive so obscure an individual without enquiries, little indeed would it become me to doubt your sincerity."

"You now put me to the blush, by giving me credit for more liberality of sentiment than I deserve," said Lady Elvira, "for though your first appearance interested me, I did not rely on its influence, without consulting your friend, Mrs. Mallett. I shall not exhibit the mortifying portrait he drew of you," she added, with a smile, "but leave you to guess at it by
its

its effect on my mind ; so, you see, I have the advantage of you—I can therefore readily forgive your scruples.”

“ You have referred to a very partial judge, Madam,” returned Helen : “ to be unfortunate is a sufficient passport to Mr. Mallett’s kindness. I cannot,” she added, while her eyes filled with tears, “ express his goodness to me, but to his bounty am I at present indebted for the necessities of life ; it would, therefore, be the highest presumption in me to accept your Ladyship’s proposal to become your guest, but if it were possible for me to be useful to you in any occupation, it would afford me the greatest satisfaction.”

“ You shall be useful to me,” said Lady Elvira ; “ it has long been the first wish of my heart to find a female friend, in whom I could place unreserved confidence, and if first impressions can ever be trusted, I am not now deceived ; do not, therefore, hesitate, from the idea of incurring an obligation

gation from a stranger, for it is I that shall be obliged by your compliance."

Helen could no longer resist, but she sighed while she considered that though she might be honoured with the appellation of Lady Elvira's friend, she must be a humble one, and without equality, how could there be disinterested friendship?—Mr. Mallett's accusation at that moment presented itself to her recollection. "He knows me better than I know myself," thought she; "till yesterday I never suspected that pride was among the number of my faults, but I am now convinced of its existence; true gratitude could never have suggested such discontented reflections." Thus corrected, she strove to express her cheerful acquiescence to the proposal, for which, she doubted not, she was indebted to Mr. Mallett's recommendation.

Lady Elvira had a small party at tea, to whom she introduced Miss Coleby as her distinguished friend: so patronized, the poor

poor Helen, whom not one of the company would have condescended to notice the preceding day, became an object of general attention ; but unused to the society of strangers, she received their compliments with diffident confusion.

Mr. Hartly (a fashionable-looking young man) sat next her, and would have engaged her on some common-place topic, such as the pleasant situation of Alvondown, its present numerous inhabitants, its salubrious air, and its great deficiency of amusements ; but to none of these remarks could Helen venture at more than a smile of acquiescence, or a single monosyllable ; till finding every effort to make her talk unsuccessful, he left her, and drawing a chair near Lady Elvira, addressed her in a half whisper, accompanied with a loud laugh, to which she gravely replied—
“ Indeed you are greatly deceived.”

Helen was convinced that the remark related to her stupidity, and the idea increased her confusion to such a degree,
that

that she found it impossible again to trust her voice on any occasion. Every individual but herself was engaged in conversation; and two ladies, between whom she sat, talked to each other across the chair, as if they were unconscious that a rational being divided them. Most sincerely did she wish herself at home in her humble cottage, but as crossing the room, to pay her compliments to Lady Elvira, while the company continued seated, was still more formidable than sitting still, she was constrained to endure the misery of her situation, till a proposal to walk on the beach relieved her embarrassment.

While preparations were making for the excursion, she went to Lady Elvira, and telling her in a whisper that she had promised to visit Mr. Mallett, she departed. "Here," thought she, "I may breathe without restraint; how painful is the sense of inferiority!—I shall never feel at ease in Lady Elvira's parties; how happy are those who may chuse their society!—Oh, Courtenay,

Courtenay, must I for ever mourn the uncertainty of your fate?—Were you here, I should seek no other protection; your affectionate and constant heart would shield me from every insult."

Assured, however, that she could no longer rely with certainty on his return, she began to reflect with additional uneasiness on the disadvantage of her unconquerable diffidence. She recollected with pain, how unfit she should be for any situation, while it so effectually obscured her talents and understanding.

She had now reached the Vicarage, and finding Mr. Mallett alone, she disclosed to him the subject of her distress.

He smiled; "I can account for your feelings, my dear," said he; "they are natural, and originate in the obscurity in which your whole life has been spent. You are conscious that you possess not the manners of fashionable life, and the contrast of those with whom you have now mixed has shewn you the deficiency; but
be

be not discouraged—a short residence with the world will throw off the awkwardness that has now distressed you; and diffidence thus corrected (though it may sometimes give pain to its possessor) is a fascinating charm, which all who behold admire; it bespeaks a feeling and sensible mind, for none but fools ever think themselves wise; and that deference and desire of instruction that it evinces, is both pleasing and flattering.”

“I know, Sir,” said Helen, “that diffidence is considered an amiable quality, but I had infinitely rather be accused of too much confidence, than suffer such a mortifying sense of inferiority as I have recently experienced.”

“It is not a strong proof of the diffidence I have described,” said Mr. Mallett, “to prefer your own ease to the opinion of the world. I would not have you vainly solicitous to obtain its approbation, but the wish to deserve it is laudable. Must I again warn you against the influence of
5 pride?—

pride?—I am sorry to find it necessary; but from whence proceeds the mortifying sense of inferiority, of which you so heavily complain?—Examine your heart, my dear child; I know you did not literally envy the rank and fortune of Lady Elvira's friends, but be assured your pain proceeded from a degree of pride (though you were unconscious of its existence), that felt insulted by superiority. I would have you consider, my Helen, that poverty is no disgrace, for a cottage may enclose a richer mind than a palace. Perhaps in good qualities, you are in general on an equality with your associates; let this idea give you courage, and teach you, in some degree, to reverence yourself. If we have too mean an opinion of our own abilities, the world is often inclined to coincide with us; in this respect a certain degree of pride is necessary, and even commendable; but it is very different from that querulous sensation which repines at the exultation of others; on the contrary, it elevates us
above

above the accidents of situation, and enables us to support our character on the most trying occasions with dignity."

"How good and salutary are your admonitions, Sir," replied Helen. "I am ashamed of having profited so little by those I have already received; I confess my error, and it shall be my future study to correct a fault from which I so deservedly suffer."

Mr. Mallett was pleased at her ingenuous confession; and far more happy than when she entered the house, did she quit it, and return to her cottage.

CHAP. VI.

"Is there, kind Heaven! no constancy in man?
No steadfast truth, no generous fix'd affection,
That can bear up against a selfish world?"

THOMSON.

MR. Hartly was acquainted with Mrs. Ashton's family, and the following morning he called on them. They had heard of Helen's visit to Lady Elvira, and were anxious to know how she became introduced to so enviable an acquaintance; it was, however, a question which Hartly could not resolve; he had only met her the preceding day; and though he was the favoured lover of Lady Elvira, he had not yet

yet been let into the secret of their intimacy.

“ It is astonishing how a woman of Lady Elvira’s sense can be pleased with affectation and sloth,” said Mrs. Ashton : “ the gentleness and modesty of Helen’s manners serve to disguise the proudest spirit in Christendom ; and as her Ladyship’s friend, Mr. Hartly, I would advise you to caution her against the hypocrite.”

“Perhaps Miss Coleby’s personal charms have deceived Lady Elvira’s judgment,” said Miss Cremur. “I know the girl is by some thought very handsome, though, for my part, I cannot discover a tolerable feature in her face; her complexion is good, but for its beauty, I fancy she is more indebted to art than nature.”

“ But you have forgotten her reputed sense and accomplishments,” said Miss Ashton ; “ I really believe she fancies herself one of the superior geniuses of the age. I think I have lately heard that she plays music, draws, speaks French and

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two or three faint efforts to retain the paper; her friend, however, conquered, and put it into Hartly's hand, whose curiosity was sufficiently awakened, and with great gravity he read the following lines:

The wind blew hard, the night was dark,
And woefully the dogs did bark,
When a poor swain, in yonder grove,
A swain o'er head and ears in love,
Began to sigh beneath a tree,
And mourn his fair one's cruelty:
"Alas! alas! where shall I go
To end this great and deadly woe?
I'll bend my steps to yonder brink;
Below the waves my form shall sink!"
He sunk beneath the waters deep,
And left his haughty fair to weep."

"Admirable, indeed!" exclaimed Hartly;
"your composition far surpasses my most sanguine expectation. The second line is most happily conceived—

"And woefully the dogs did bark:"

—indeed,

indeed, I think you have fully acquired the art recommended by Swift, the profound, or the knack of sinking in poetry."

"Oh, bless me," replied Miss Ashton, throwing a greater degree of confusion into her countenance than before, "your compliment is so superlative, that I must possess more than a competent share of vanity to believe you sincere; the comparison is infinitely beyond my deserts."

"By no means," said Hartly; "the compliment, if you consider it one, speaks my real sentiments."

He begged permission to retain the invaluable composition, which being granted, he expressed the highest sense of gratitude, and walked off, well pleased with the prospect of affording entertainment to the next company with whom he happened to mix.

Hartly was one of those characters who can gather some ludicrous anecdote from every occurrence, which, with additions, and the advantage of a humourous style of expression,

expression, rendered him an universal favourite.

Lady Elvira, whose ideas, though a woman of the world, were not contaminated by its customs, in her serious moments condemned the dangerous talent ; but Hartly was so guileless, and apparently open to conviction, that it was impossible to be long angry with him, or to repress the gratitude she felt for his preference, when so many of her young acquaintance were dying for him. Lady Elvira possessed more sense and less vanity than the generality of her sex ; but a latent spark certainly existed in her bosom, or she could not have bestowed her heart on one so totally undeserving the treasure.

Lady Elvira's fortune, though not large, exceeded Hartly's expectations ; the connection, too, was desirable, for his origin was obscure ; nor had he any recommendation to the circles with whom he now mixed, but pleasant manners, and that degree of assurance that supported him with
firmness

firmness under every mortification. He felt not the smallest affection for Lady Elvira, for her person was plain, and he had not sufficient delicacy of sentiment to estimate her intrinsic worth. He thought Helen extremely beautiful, and the account he had heard of her poverty, joined to the idea he had formed of her simplicity, favoured his hopes of obtaining her on his own terms: as Lady Elvira's guest, he doubted not of finding sufficient opportunities of rendering himself agreeable to her, and he flattered himself that if he managed the affair skilfully, she might one day share with him the spoils of Lady Elvira's fortune. Not once did he suspect that in Helen's breast lived an object whose influence could shield her from all his artifices.

Lady Elvira's partiality for her seemed to encrease with her acquaintance, and she, in a short time, prevailed on her to become one of her family.

[The unpleasant restraint which the presence

sence of Lady Elvira and her acquaintance at first created, by degrees wore away, and the ease and sweetness of her manners rendered her an universal favourite, except with those illiberal beings who could never forgive the crime of poverty.

Hartly was very circumspect in his attention towards her; he was sufficiently aware that jealousy is, in some degree, an appendage to sincere affection, and it was scarcely possible for Lady Elvira to look on Helen without a consciousness of her own inferiority. Nothing could be a stronger proof of her liberality of sentiment than the risk of patronizing so dangerous a rival; as yet, however, she discovered no circumstance that could induce her to regret the generous action.

Hartly had been studying the most probable means of making an impression on Helen's heart; he perceived that vanity was not a predominant trait in her character; it was not likely, therefore, to expunge her gratitude to Lady Elvira, and
make

make her exult in the superiority of charms that could rival her friend in the affection of her lover; he therefore only strove to render himself agreeable in her eyes, by every mark of respectful attention, to which, as Lady Elvira's friend, she was entitled, and by every action that could place his character in the most amiable point of view.

The fascination of his manners was universally acknowledged, of which he was by no means ignorant. Assailed by such powerful attractions, he thought it impossible for Helen's heart to continue long insensible; and building strong hopes on the influence of a first love, on a girl possessed of so unsuspecting and warm a heart, he doubted not but time would realize his wishes.

Thus passed two months, when as the gloomy days of winter approached, Lady Elvira proposed leaving Alvondown. It was a painful idea to Helen; she retained no friend there, indeed, except Mr. Mal-

lett, and old Agnes, her nurse ; but to quit those scenes endeared to her by the remembrance of her father, and of her still-adored Courtenay, caused many a bitter pang.

Walking one morning to the favourite spot where she had bade the latter adieu, and ruminating mournfully on the subject, she met Miss Cremur and Miss Ashton. They accosted her with great civility, but the sneer conspicuous on their countenances evinced the rancour of their hearts : she had scarcely passed them before she espied a letter, which she concluded one of them had dropped ; and she was going to announce the discovery, till the writing arrested her attention—it was Percival Courtenay's !—Astonishment and anxiety suspended every other recollection ; she took it in her hand, and kissed the superscription, before she perceived it to be addressed to Miss Cremur.

Without waiting to deliberate on the propriety of perusing the contents, she
opened

opened it; but what were her feelings when she found it filled with grateful acknowledgements for the generous offer she had made him, which he meant to accept, and was now returning, with the intention of leading her to the altar as his bride:

It would be vain to attempt pourtraying the sensations that this discovery excited in the bosom of Helen; it was impossible to collect her ideas, and she remained on the spot, with her eyes vacantly fixed on the letter, when the ladies to whom it belonged returned to redeem it. It is unnecessary to remark that it was designedly dropped for Helen's perusal, and they were sufficiently near to see their wishes realized; they therefore returned, and Miss Cremur expressed the strongest degree of astonishment and indignation at the meanness of which Helen had been guilty.

This attack roused her from her stupor—she folded the letter, and putting it into its owner's hand, without speaking, attempted to proceed; but it was only an

attempt, for a giddiness seized her head, and she fell senseless on the ground.

Miss Ashton, who considered that it would be very unheroine-like, and very unlike the sensibility which so poetical a genius ought to possess, to leave a poor damsel in so distressful a situation, particularly as the tender passion had been the means of afflicting her, ran to her relief, and with Sophia's assistance raised her from the ground. Several minutes elapsed before Helen revived; when she did, Miss Ashton enquired, with great apparent solicitude, how she found herself? and requested that she might be permitted to assist her home; she condemned, with affected sincerity, the imprudence of her friend, who had, though totally without design, given her so much pain.

Helen could not answer, but she silently rejected their offered support, and proceeded slowly towards Lady Elvira's habitation, so stupified that she was insensible of her misery. Hartly met her, and asto-

nished at her pale looks, enquired, in a feeling and anxious voice, if she was ill?

"Ill!" she repeated; "do you too insult me with such a question?"

Still more surprised, he exclaimed—"Good God! what is the matter?—You can scarcely stand—allow me to support you now—oh that I might do so for ever!"

Inattentive to all he said, but again ready to sink, she suffered him to draw her hand within his arm, and accompany her to Lady Elvira's, where she silently quitted him, and retired to her apartment. Her ideas were still so deranged, that inanity seemed to pervade her senses; she could not weep; she could not even recollect why she wished to shed tears.

In this torpid state Lady Elvira found her, and greatly alarmed at her appearance, and incoherent answers, immediately applied for medical assistance.

The apothecary, who soon obeyed the summons, pronounced her disorder to be the effect of a fright, and prescribed accordingly;

cordingly ; but nothing could rouse her from this distressing stupor, till towards the following morning, when she fell asleep, and Lady Elvira left her to the repose that seemed so much required.

It was when Helen awoke from this slumber that the extreme misery of her situation presented itself. Courtenay, the adored friend that her heart had so long and so fondly cherished, had deceived her !—That being whom she believed perfect, had proved himself a villain ; how could she endure such a conviction ?—Hitherto his known virtues had been her consolation.—“ If he lives,” she thought, “ he will approve my conduct, and reward it ; and even if early fate has snatched him from the possibility of realizing my hopes in this world, still there is comfort in believing that his hovering spirit is permitted to protect me here, and in anticipating a union of souls in those blessed regions where our happiness can meet with no alloy !”

Thus she consoled herself during the
anxious

anxious suspense that his long silence occasioned ; but now every pleasing idea, every flattering prospect, was cruelly destroyed ; the recollection of this sad contrast at length relieved her agonized bosom by a flood of tears.

Lady Elvira visited her early ; she rejoiced to find her better, but persuaded her not to leave her apartment, to which advice she readily acceded ; for in the present state of her mind, the greatest indulgence she sought was solitude. Lady Elvira's curiosity to know the cause of her strange disorder was strongly excited ; she, however, forbore to make enquiries, which would, perhaps, again reduce the sufferer to the distressing state from which she was so recently relieved.

A morning visit from Mrs. Ashton at length unravelled the mystery. She called, she informed Lady Elvira, to enquire for her fair and amiable friend, whom poor Sophia had innocently distressed, by dropping

ping a letter, which Miss Coleby found and read.

"Is it possible," said Lady Elvira, who doubted the assertion, "that Helen could act so meanly?"

"The poor thing's curiosity was, I confess, excusable," replied Mrs. Ashton, "where she was so deeply interested. I believe I once hinted to you an attachment which subsisted between her and Percival Courtenay, Mr. Coleby's pupil, whom the former endeavoured, by every artifice he could devise, to attach to his daughter. The young man, unused to any other society, naturally felt a brotherly friendship for Helen, which the poor deluded girl mistook for love, and it, unfortunately, won her heart. Sophia Cremur, likewise, his father's ward, beheld his merit with partial eyes, and aware of her superior fortune and accomplishments, Mr. Coleby prevented an intimacy between them, for which reason he declined visiting me, though we had been before most particular friends; for he
well

well knew my friendship for the dear orphan, and feared I might frustrate his plan. Time and chance, however, at length introduced him to the hidden beauties of Sophia's mind, and he could not be insensible either to her merit or flattering partiality, which, inexperienced as she was in the practice of dissimulation, was sufficiently apparent ; but he was afraid to betray his sentiments to his tutor, who, he knew, had projected a marriage for him with Helen. Probably this part of his conduct you may style duplicity, and indeed I have frequently blamed him for not candidly avowing the favourable impression Sophia had made on his heart ; but great allowances must be made, in consideration of his dependent situation, and Mr. Coleby's superior art and address. Devoid of vanity, and not much interested in such a discovery, perhaps he hardly perceived that Helen loved him, though she imputed every act of common civility to a warmer sensation : thus they continued mutually deceived, till

till a summons from Courtenay's father sent him abroad, and as soon as he found himself at liberty, he declared the sincerity of his attachment to Sophia. Poor fellow, he has been very unfortunate, for the relation to whom he was sent died before he arrived, and he had the additional misfortune to be shipwrecked, by which he lost all his possessions. Thus a stranger to the country, he had no prospect of advancing his fortune, and he determined to return, though such an undertaking, in his forlorn situation, was attended with sufficient difficulty, not having property to defray the expences of the voyage. Sophia heard of his distress, and generously sent him a sum for that purpose: the letter, therefore, which poor Miss Coleby found, was expressive of his gratitude, and of his intention to return immediately, and claim his Sophia's hand."

"This story," said Lady Elvira, who had listened with great attention, "differs most widely from the circumstances you formerly

formerly related: perhaps my memory is rudely tenacious, for it certainly retains the substance of your former account, which was, that an engagement had really been formed between Mr. Courtenay and Miss Coleby, to the great disappointment of Mr. Coleby's ambitious hopes, who had flattered himself that Miss Nelly's charms would prove quite as saleable as her sister's had done. Can you have forgotten this expression, which, I believe, I have repeated in your own words?—or did you suppose that your liberality of sentiment in describing my young friend had escaped my recollection?"

Mrs. Ashton was greatly embarrassed; she had indeed forgotten the account she had before given, respecting Percival and Helen, and after a long silence, she replied, with evident confusion—"I really do not exactly recollect what I then said, but I am sure it was the current story, which I preferred, from the uncertainty of the young man's fate; it was not my wish to
give

give the poor girl pain; and if Courtenay had never returned, which before the receipt of his last letter was so doubtful, I thought she might as well be spared the misery of knowing his attachment to Sophia."

"You were extremely cautious to spare Miss Coleby's feelings," said Lady Elvira, with great emphasis: "no one who knows Helen will believe her the weak, love-sick girl you have described; and if there was an engagement between Mr. Courtenay and her, I think it no striking proof of the sense or goodness for which you have given Miss Cremur credit, to accept the prostituted vows of such a perfidious young man."

"You are so partial, Lady Elvira," said Mrs. Ashton, "that it is vain to attempt undeceiving you. I venerate the generous motives that actuate your conduct towards the unfortunate Helen; nor would I, for the world, lessen the esteem of the only female friend she could ever boast of acquiring:

quiring : but truth will one day appear, when I wish you may find her worthy the patronage you so disinterestedly bestow."

"Truth, as you say, will one day prevail, Mrs. Ashton," said Lady Elvira, "and discover the malicious representations of Miss Coleby's enemies."

Thoroughly disconcerted at Lady Elvira's uncivil treatment, Mrs. Ashton departed, after hoping that Miss Coleby would not suffer very severely from her misplaced and unreturned attachment. It was not in Mrs. Ashton's power, by all her malignant aspersions, to prejudice Lady Elvira against the friendless orphan whom she had engaged to protect ; even had she admitted the truth of Mrs. Ashton's relation, it would have encreased her pity for her credulous friend ; but her respect for Helen's understanding, and delicacy of sentiment, was so great, that she could not, for a moment, believe her heart could deceive her with respect to Courtenay's attention. Of him, Mrs. Ashton's account had

had stamped the most unfavourable opinion; his inconstancy and deceit were crimes she could never forgive; and when she contrasted Helen with Miss Cremur, and recollected that he had abandoned her amiable friend for such a being, she thought the weakness of his mind must equal the depravity of his heart; and she regretted that Helen should have formed an attachment to such an unworthy object: she, however, considered the seclusion of her situation, when she was in habits of intimacy with Courtenay, and excused the error of judgment into which she had fallen.

She now rejoiced at the discovery of his treachery, and doubted not but the novel scenes to which she meant so shortly to introduce her, would obliterate every painful remembrance of her perfidious lover. Had she known Courtenay, her conclusion, probably, would not have been so decisive, but a stranger to the fascinating graces of his conversation, she could only behold the vain deceitful libertine.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

“ ——— Hopes I have none——

But from my soul to banish,

While weeping memory there retains her seat,

Thoughts which the purest bosom might have cherish'd,

Is more than I can promise.”

THOMSON.

TO describe the distressing retrospect of past happiness, which Helen's recollection continued to present, is impossible; vainly she attempted to sooth her perturbed spirits, and account for the strange inconsistency of Courtenay's conduct. Had he been the acquaintance of a day, or a year, she would have doubted her knowledge of his
his

his character, but Courtenay, the friend, the companion of her earliest years, whose heart was ever guileless and open as the day—could he be so changed?—could he, who had so often declared that life would prove a dreary wilderness without his Helen, so soon expunge her image from his breast?—could he, with such unfeeling indifference, doom the remainder of her days to wretchedness?—Where then could she expect stability, if that heart, which had ever been as unveiled to her as her own, deceived her?

Lady Elvira, who, on the discovery of Helen's distress, concluded that solitude would encrease it, seldom left her; she never led to the subject, and carefully concealed her knowledge of the cause, well assured that the discussion, though it might afford a momentary gratification, would only be the means of cherishing the remembrance of her unworthy friend. Helen was likewise glad to avoid an explanation,

tion, and rejoiced that Lady Elvira made no enquiries.

Mrs. Ashton returned to her house in no very pleasant humour.

“Well, Madam,” said Sophia, “have you succeeded in your endeavour to persuade Lady Elvira of Courtenay’s propriety of sentiment, in preferring me to her credulous friend?”

“No,” replied Mrs. Ashton, “for Lady Elvira is equally credulous. I know not what arts the girl can have practised to gain the patronage of a person in Lady Elvira’s superior situation; there must be a strange similarity of sentiment on some subject with which the world is unacquainted; we are, however, free to conjecture what we please, and I confess I have more than once observed Lady Elvira’s face flushed to an uncommon degree, and to see Miss Helen reeling on the beach has been no very novel sight, as you and Harriet can witness.”

“Good Heavens, Madam!” returned So-

phia, "can you suppose her agitation, when we last saw her, proceeded from such a cause?"

"I would not circulate any report to the poor thing's disadvantage," rejoined Mrs. Ashton; "but I cannot help acknowledging it my opinion that her disorder proceeded more from liquor in her head than love in her heart."

"Indeed," said Sophia, "I do recollect, since you declare your suspicions, that she staggered when she stooped for the letter, before its contents could have affected her, and her stupidity afterwards certainly appeared more the effect of excess than agitation. This circumstance will, I am sure, sufficiently excuse Courtenay's inconstancy."

"Upon my word, I regret her degradation with sincerity," said Harriet, "for I had a set of pretty ideas in my head, which I meant to methodise into a poem, on the subject of her distress; but it would be a profanation of my talents to celebrate as
an

an heroine a person addicted to so despicable a vice."

"To celebrate her virtues would be indeed a prostitution of your talents, my dear Harriet," said Mrs. Ashton; "but have you no genius for satire?—If you can describe her faults with some degree of humour, your reputation will be compleat, for nothing is so sure to meet with universal applause as personal censure, particularly if the object is known."

Harriet was transported at the ravishing prospect of becoming a famed authoress; she had never, indeed, attempted the style her mother recommended, but she made no doubt of succeeding as well as she had hitherto done in the pathetic; at all events, she determined to make the trial.

To Helen the whole world now appeared a dreary wilderness; no circumstance could affect her; perhaps she could even have heard Mrs. Ashton's infamous insinuation without emotion. Alvondown, the much-loved scene of her childhood, no

longer possessed a charm to sooth her spirits; every prospect was hateful; even the idea of seeing Mr. Mallètt was irksome; he might be acquainted with Courtenay's perfidy, and it was a subject she could not endure the thoughts of entering on; she therefore confined herself entirely to Lady Elvira's house, and in a great measure to her own apartment. While the depression on her spirits was imputed to ill health, she embraced the opportunity of secluding herself; but she was aware that the time would come, when gratitude for Lady Elvira's kindness must teach her to conquer, or at least conceal her feelings. The few powers to please which she possessed, it was her duty to exert to the greatest extent, as the only return she could make for the protection so generously afforded her.

Hartly was their constant guest, and the silent sympathy which all his actions evinced for Helen's distress, excited her warmest gratitude and esteem. It is most certain that his hopes were a little damped,
when

when he first heard of her long and sincere attachment to Courtenay, but the inconstancy of her favoured swain renewed his expectations of success; the contrast of his behaviour, he concluded, would produce a favourable effect in his behalf; and believing the female heart as much the seat of resentment as vanity, he thought an opportunity of shewing her lover that it was in her power to be revenged, would prove an irresistible argument in his favour: but how little was he acquainted with the heart of Helen!

As Lady Elvira's accepted lover, she felt herself highly gratified by his attention and friendship for her; but could she, for one moment, have suspected his design, how would she have despised him!

Wintry storms now induced Lady Elvira to fix a day for leaving Alvondown. Helen felt nothing to regret at this resolution; all places would, for the future, prove indifferent to her: without the least emotion, therefore, she prepared for her departure.

To the idea of parting with Mr. Mallett she was not, however, insensible; and she walked to the Vicarage, for the purpose of bidding him adieu, the evening before she was to begin her journey. Mr. Mallett was from home, and she strolled to an arbour at the head of a pleasant orchard behind the house.

The shrub that formed it she had, assisted by Courtenay, planted; and the initials of their names, with the date of the year, since which four seasons had revolved, he had carved on one of the willows. What changes had time effected since that period! "Changes," thought Helen, "which I have been ill prepared to support: to Heaven's decrees, I trust, I have bent, if not with cheerfulness, at least with resignation; but for Courtenay's inconstancy, where can I seek consolation?—His heart I believed no temptation could alienate from an object so professedly dear to him. Oh! did I so confidently rely on the perfection of any human being?—never will

will I again anticipate the completion of hope on this side the grave, when that hope rests on the caprice of another; for if Courtenay could deceive me, where can I expect stability?"

At this moment Helen would have expunged from her heart every recollection of his former virtues, could she have swallowed the Lethean draught; but it was little likely to be found in her present situation, where every object renewed the remembrance of their former friendship.—Not a flower bloomed on the earth, but seemed, by its beauty, to express gratitude for their joint exertions; not a shrub shook with the breeze, but sympathized with her sorrow for the loss of that friend who had so often been sheltered by its foliage.

These were not objects likely to lessen her misery, and Mr. Mallett found her in tears; he did not, however, appear to notice her sorrow, but accosted her with his usual cheerfulness; she was, therefore, constrained to disguise her feelings.

She spoke of her approaching departure, which she hoped would account for the depression of her spirits; but it was an unnecessary precaution, for Mr. Mallett was well acquainted with the real cause, though he forbore to express it. Her emotion would not permit her to speak, when she attempted to bid her respected friend adieu.

He told her, that though she quitted Alvondown, she would find that she had not lost her presumptuous monitor, for he should continue to obtrude his advice, as long as she allowed him to believe it acceptable.

"Oh, do not think so ill of me, as to suspect that it can ever cease to be acceptable, my dear Sir," she replied; "I shall be grateful and proud of your correspondence: the assurance that I retain one friend, who will not abandon me, is now my only consolation left me." Her emotion would not allow her to proceed.

"You have many friends, Helen," replied

plied Mr. Mallett, " who love and respect you ; perhaps there are some whom you accuse of unsteadiness. I know no circumstance more painful than such a suspicion ; but we must make allowances for the frailty of human nature, and we must likewise learn to become independent beings, as far as our own happiness is concerned. In all situations we should recollect what is due to ourselves :—into what a deplorable state of imbecility must our minds be sunk, if they can afford us no source of comfort—and if we have trusted our whole hope of felicity on the caprice of others as vacant as ourselves !—I do not mean to infer that we are to divest ourselves of those amiable feelings that attach us with all the warmth of friendship to those we esteem ; nor is it possible to avoid suffering with severity, when we find ourselves deceived ; but it is necessary to temper even our best affections with moderation. Helen confessed, by her tears, that she knew to what he alluded ; she pressed his

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hand

hand to her lips in silence. He embraced her; and it was grateful to her heart to feel the sympathizing tear drop on her cheek when he kissed it.

She hastened from him to call on Agnes, who lamented with bitterness the approaching departure of her poor dear Miss Helen.

"It is hard indeed," she said, while she looked on Helen with tearful eyes, "that such beauty and innocence can't escape envy. Some folks, because they be wicked themselves, like to make every body else appear as bad; but nobody that knows their vicious tempers will believe their scandalous stories."

"To what do you allude, Agnes?" asked Helen.

"God bless you, Miss," she replied, "don't you know what Mrs. Ashton and her young minxes have said of you?"

"No, indeed," answered Helen, whose imagination immediately suggested something respecting Courtenay.

"Then

"Then I'll tell you," said Agnes, "for 'tis right that every body should know their friends from their *inimies*. They say that you and Lady Elvira are both too fond of the bottle, and that you sit down together and drink till you can't either of you give a *raisonable* answer. I heard Mrs. Ashton telling some gentlefolks so in the open street the other day, when you and Lady Elvira passed by them. I was just behind, and I stalked after them to know what they would say of you; and I heard *em* tell about poor Master Percival Courtenay. They said that he loved you once, but since he found you *dicted* to such a *wize*, he had left you, and was now courting Miss Cremur, who was one of the most *generousist*, *liberalist* young ladies that ever lived. I could *harly* help *contardicting* 'em as I went, for I was sure enough that if poor Master Percival was alive, he would never marry any body but his dear Miss Helen."

"Mrs. Ashton is very malicious," interrupted Helen, with quickness; "I have

never deserved ill treatment from her; but there is no guarding against the insinuations of such malevolent minds: conscious innocence will, however, baffle her efforts; nor shall I feel unhappy at the circulation of a report, that will only display the malignity of her own heart."

She took a sorrowful leave of Agnes: she scarcely felt her misery increased by the story she had just heard; for if their machinations had prevailed on Courtenay to believe her so miserably fallen, it was not strange that he should abandon her; and the scandalous invention could be so clearly confuted, that she began to flatter herself that his return would still realize her former hopes.

CHAP. VIII.

"Why lure me from these pale retreats?
Why rob me of these pensive sweets?
Can music's voice—can beauty's eye—
Can painting's glowing hand supply
A charm so suited to my mind,
As blows this hollow blast of wind?"

MASON.

AT an early hour the following morning, Lady Elvira and her friends left Alvondown; they deviated from the public road, to spend the first night at a neat small inn, whose owner had been a servant in Lady Elvira's family.

Helen was more agitated than pleased at
the

the idea of stopping the next day at the town which poor Emily inhabited. To spend so many hours near her without attempting to see her, was impossible ; yet did she dread the reception she might meet from Mr. Clemments.

Lady Elvira had learnt Mrs. Clemments's situation from Mrs. Ashton ; Helen therefore disclosed to her the apprehensions she felt. Lady Elvira advised her to combat them, and by all means call at the house, believing that the most savage wretch in creation could not debar his wife the trifling gratification of embracing an only sister after so long a separation.

Accordingly she departed, accompanied by Hartly, who attended her to the house, and then left her, though not without taking a survey of its gloomy external appearance. With a trembling hand she lifted the rusty knocker, which conveyed a hollow sound to the apartments within.

In a few minutes a dirty domestic peeped through a casement in the second story,
and

and enquired, in rather a discordant tone, who was at the door?

Helen asked if her mistress was at home?

"Y-ess, I believe so, but I'll ask master," was the answer.

Such an application was no very favourable omen; however she was constrained to submit: and when her patience had been exercised by standing a full quarter of an hour at the door, the same servant opened it, who, after admitting her, and carefully bolting it on the inside, told her she might follow. She passed through an unfurnished hall, when a door opened, which discovered a small parlour, with its walls and ceiling blackened with smoke.

Mr. and Mrs. Clemments were sitting very near a small fire; at some distance, at a deal table at work, sat their daughter, a girl about thirteen. Mr. Clemments bestowed a scrutinizing look on Helen as she entered, which seemed to imply—

"What is your business here?"

She did not, however, heed the enquiry.

but endeavoured, in the sallow countenance of Mrs. Clemments, to discover the once-blooming and lovely features of her sister; but no traces of her youthful beauty remained, and Helen asked, in an anxious voice, if she was Mrs. Clemments?—On being answered in the affirmative, she approached and took her hand—"Have you totally forgotten your little sister Helen?" said she.

"Good God!" exclaimed Mrs. Clemments, "is it possible?—can you be my beloved sister, the unfortunate orphan, whose hard fate I have so unavailingly lamented?"—She affectionately embraced her, and wept in her bosom.

Mr. Clemments did not immediately interrupt this pathetic scene, but waited till they were quietly seated, to propose his queries.

"And you really are the youngest daughter of the deceased Mr. Coleby?"

"I am, Sir."

"And pray, if the question may not be deemed

deemed impertinent, what brings you to this part of the world?—I should think a young lady in your situation must be greatly incommoded by the enormous expence of travelling. There is, in the first place, chaise hire, for you surely could not undertake such a journey on horseback at this unfavourable season; then the drivers must be fee'd (which, by the bye, is a shameful imposition on the public in general, and what I never submitted to in my life; but your timorous sex have not strength of resolution to refuse, therefore the fine is always levied on you with more than ordinary severity; next must be reckoned the frequent stoppages on the road, the exorbitant price of provisions, and lastly the bed, which I suppose you have hired at the inn from whence you came; altogether I should scarcely conceive it possible to compute the sum at less than five pounds; and unless you are on some expedition which may be expected to improve your fortune, I should suppose it
might

might have been more advisable to have remained at Alvondown."

"Have I not reason to be very grateful," said Mrs. Clemments, "if she has put herself to all the inconveniences you have enumerated, to visit me?"

"To visit you! umph," said Mr. Clemments. "I dare say Miss Coleby has more sense, than to squander so much money merely for the sake of spending an hour with you."

"I trust she will spend more than an hour with me," said Mrs. Clemments, with warmth; "it will be too cruel to refuse shelter to the only relation of mine who ever entered your house."

"You know, my dear, we have no spare bed," said he; "if indeed Miss Coleby is not better provided for, and will condescend to accept half of the servant's bed for a night or so, she shall be welcome."

"Oh, Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Clemments, "her's is indeed a fit apartment to receive my sister."

"Dear

"Dear mamma," said the little Emily, who had by this time crept close to Helen, "is not my bed large enough for my aunt? —I will, with pleasure, sleep with Winifred, if she will stay."

"Hold your tongue, Miss," said her father, sternly, "and return to your work; who gave you leave to interfere in affairs above your comprehension?"

Mortified at this severe reprimand, the poor little Emily resumed her station at the deal table, though not without bestowing a look on her aunt, which said—"I wish I was permitted to love you." Helen understood, and returned her affectionate wish.

"As to Miss Coleby's objection to the servant's bed," proceeded Mr. Clemments, addressing his wife, "she has not been accustomed to a husband's fortune to support her extravagance; her notions, therefore, may not, perhaps, soar so high; and I think it very probable that Winifred's apartment may be as superb as her finances may be able

able to procure her at the Bear; for the landlady knows her business, and never lets her best rooms but to those who can afford to pay for them."

"My dear sister," said Helen, while she threw a contemptuous glance on Mr. Clemments, "do not distress yourself on my account: I have, by means of Mr. Mallett's friendly recommendation, met with a kind protectress, with whom I am now travelling to Bath; had I been really distressed for the want of a sheltering roof, this is the last I would have sought; but I believed an intrusion for one hour might be suffered, since it is the first, and probably will be the last with which you will ever be troubled."

Helen spoke from the heat of resentment, at Mr. Clemments' insulting treatment, without considering her sister's feelings, which, had she reflected one moment, she would have believed sufficiently wounded without such a retort from her.

"I am

"I am rejoiced indeed," said Mrs. Clemments, "that you have found so generous a protectress; your friendless situation has been a source of perpetual misery to me, since the death of my revered father."

"I likewise congratulate you on your good fortune, Miss Coleby," said Mr. Clemments, "though, as I before told you, you should have been welcome to a night's lodging in this house, if you could put up with a few inconveniences; indeed, on recollection, we could accommodate Miss Coleby with our bed, and sleep ourselves in the servant's apartment; you would not object to such an arrangement, my dear, for the sake of obliging your sister."

"I should be extremely sorry to intrude so unseasonably on your hospitality," said Helen, drily; "and I believe Lady Elvira now expects my return."

Mr. Clemments looked astonished; and had it not been too late, would have altered his behaviour, from the conviction that
that

that she really wanted not his assistance ; for he had before persuaded himself that she came a petitioner for pecuniary aid.—She, however, staid not to investigate his sentiments, but embracing her weeping sister, and her affectionate niece, she bade them adieu, and hastened from the inhospitable door.

“ Poor sufferer ! ” thought she, “ how has she deserved so severe a lot !—If poverty is oppressive, how much more painful to our feelings must be the possession of riches, without the power to bestow them !—Surely no station in this world can be so truly wretched, as that of being irrevocably united to a being whose every action encreases our disgust. How few can justly appreciate the characters of those with whom they enter into the most solemn of all engagements !—indeed, it is impossible to know the heart, even after years of familiar intercourse.”

Emily's lot was certainly a severe one ; but it was not, perhaps, so acutely painful

as a similar situation would have proved to Helen. Emily was, by nature, placid and good; she had nothing to amend in her disposition; nor had she to contend with very warm feelings. Every action of her life was dictated by principle, independent of feeling. On the most trying occasions, she always possessed presence of mind to deliberate, and ask herself what she ought to do. She had more merit in bestowing a benefaction than those whose sensibility is interested, for the only pleasure she derived, was the assurance of having performed her duty.

Had she possessed the means, she would have been active and sedulous to relieve the distresses of the poor, for she was impressed with a strong sentiment of the importance of charity; but as it was not her own fault that her contributions were withheld, she felt no severe conflicts in reconciling herself to her destiny; and when she heard of poverty and distress, which she was not permitted to relieve, after the appeal

peal of—"Heaven knows I would assist them, were it in my power," she felt satisfied; nor were her feelings disturbed at the recollection of their sufferings. Thus she spent her life, if not happily, at least in tranquillity—a convincing proof that comfort and peace are produced solely by a contented disposition of mind, independent of situation or circumstance.

This was a secret with which Helen was totally unacquainted; possessed of the most lively feelings, it had been the sole study of her life, aided by the admonitions and friendly advice of her father and Percival Courtenay, to correct the errors into which they too often betrayed her.

Lady Elvira left T—— the following day, and proceeded towards Bath, where they at length arrived in safety.

Every scene was novel to Helen; and for some time her thoughts were diverted from the subject that so entirely engrossed them. A large circle of acquaintance paid their early respects to Lady Elvira; and as
Helen

Hartly found here more frequent opportunities of paying her pointed attentions, which he failed not to embrace ; and unconscious of his intention, she felt grateful for the friendship he professed, and returned it with unreserved confidence.

Lady Elvira now remarked, with a sensation somewhat resembling pain, the pleasure he seemed to experience from this intercourse with Helen ; he was, indeed, particularly guarded in her Ladyship's presence ; but what can elude the observation of a woman in love ?—She was not naturally of a jealous disposition ; but the superiority of Helen's charms was, even by herself, acknowledged ; and it was scarcely possible wholly to avoid fearing their influence. She believed herself superior to such an apprehension, and would have

declared her pride sufficient to support his desertion, should his sentiments change; but affection contended, in secret, that it would not be so easily subdued.

Several weeks had passed since their arrival at Bath, when, as they walked in the pump-room one morning, they were greatly surprised by the appearance of Mrs. and Miss Ashton, and Miss Cremur; a second glance discovered Percival Courtenay in deep conversation with the latter.

Helen would have passed without noticing them, but their triumph would have been incomplete had they spared her feelings; Mrs. Ashton therefore stopped, and addressed Lady Elvira, in a style that might have induced indifferent spectators to believe them the most partial friends, had not her Ladyship received her salutations with the greatest coldness.

Helen's eyes met Courtenay's by accident.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "is it possible?" but instantly recollecting the impropriety

propriety of an *eclaircissement* at such a place, he checked himself, and attempted not to proceed.

She bestowed on him a look strongly expressive both of resentment and contempt, and then followed Lady Elvira, with all the assumed indifference she could command. "The letter, then," thought she, "was no deception; Courtenay is indeed perfidious."

Though scarcely able to stand, she determined to suppress her feelings, and to shew him that esteem alone could support her affection. Lady Elvira did not know him; she was, therefore, ignorant of her friend's misery.

Hartly at this moment joined them, accompanied by a Mr. Clifton, who expressed great pleasure at meeting Lady Elvira.— "You have been a traveller," said the latter, "since I had last the pleasure of seeing you."

"Oh yes," he replied, "I have journeyed through great part of the Netherlands,

lands, Russia, and Germany, and have visited the celebrated Spa in Westphalia; compared with the buildings of which these edifices are mere baby-houses; indeed I think the whole city of Bath would stand commodiously in one of their apartments."

"Indeed!" said Lady Elvira; "then I suppose the inhabitants of the Spa were Aborigines of Brobdignag."

"Where?" said he; "I know no place in Germany that bears that name." Hartly and Lady Elvira smiled. "But, upon my soul, it is a most charming place; and then the ladies are so lovely!—Oh the elegance of their figures, and the grace of their motions, are entirely indescribable."

"I should guess so," replied Hartly; "for you are the first traveller that has attempted a panegyric on the shape and mien of the German ladies; you may, therefore, with due credit to your superior discernment for the discovery, leave the description to some equally inventive successor."

"True,"

"True," said he; "but I only wish you could just take a view of them from hence, I am sure you would never again admire an English beauty. Oh, they are so superior! faith, I can scarcely endure to look at my own countrywomen, after contemplating the charms of the foreign Venuses, with whom I have lately associated."

"Stop," my dear Helen," said Lady Elvira, "and drop Mr. Clifton a curtesy for the compliment he has paid us."

Helen had not heard a syllable of the conversation, but she attempted to smile at her friend's request.

"Upon my soul, I beg ten thousand pardons, my dear Lady Elvira," said he; "I had entirely forgotten that I was addressing my remarks to female ears; however, the present company is always excepted."

Hartly laughed heartily at his apology—"You have greatly improved the compliment, undoubtedly," said he.

Somewhat abashed at the blunder, Clif-

ton affected not to understand it, but took out his opera-glass, and levelled it at an approaching party, which happened to be Mrs. Ashton's. "The girl nearest me is cursedly handsome," said he, before they were out of hearing; "do you know them, Lady Elvira?"

"The ladies are from Alvondown," she replied; "I do not know their escort; do you, Miss Coleby?"

"I—do—not——indeed; I—cannot—tell," she hesitatingly answered: and Lady Elvira, who guessed the truth, complained of being tired; and without appearing to perceive Helen's agitation, immediately quitted the rooms.

On their return, they found cards of invitation for the following evening, from Mrs. and Miss Elton, which, as Lady Elvira had no prior engagement, she accepted.

Mrs. Elton visited Bath for the recovery of her health; a fever the preceding summer had left her in a deplorable state of debility; and the contraction of one of
her

her legs rendered her incapable of crossing the room without assistance. She was recommended to try the effect of the Bath waters, for which purpose she had removed thither.

Miss Elton, who had been introduced to Helen, soon after the latter's arrival, professed a great degree of partiality and friendship for her; and Helen, pleased with the open simplicity of her manners, felt grateful for her favourable opinion.

Most gladly would Helen, in the present state of her mind, have declined the invitation; but she wanted resolution to declare her feelings to Lady Elvira, who, she knew, considered it an unpardonable degree of weakness thus to cherish the remembrance of the worthless Courtenay.—How difficult was the task of supporting the dignity her friend considered so indispensable!—Every visitor that relieved her from the heavy burthen of assisting in conversation was an acquisition, for which reason only could Lady Woolcomb, who

was now announced; he received as an acceptable guest.

Lady Woolcomb had frequently expressed the most superlative degree of admiration for Helen; and had hinted how greatly she envied Lady Elvira the delightful task of raising such merit from obscurity. Lady Woolcomb was very rich, and had more than once given Helen to understand, that should any circumstance deprive her of Lady Elvira's protection, she should never want a friend.

Helen, who believed that language always expressed the sentiments of the heart, felt highly gratified at such flattering and undeserved marks of friendship; but though it soothed her heart, it could not heal the corroding wound that the unfeeling Courtenay had inflicted.

At Mrs. Elton's they met a large party of strangers; and Helen hoped, in such a group, to escape observation, and to pass the evening in solitude. Lady Woolcomb and Maria Elton, however, disappointed her;

her; she found it impossible to listen to their conversation; but she used her utmost exertions to appear attentive, till a servant announced Mrs. Ashton.

In a moment she appeared, accompanied by her daughter, Miss Cremur, and Percival Courtenay.

Maria paid them the compliments of congratulation; after which she placed them at a distant part of the room, and returned to Helen. "These ladies were your neighbours, I find," said she; "do you know them?"

"Yes—I believe—that is, I did once know them, but have no desire to renew the acquaintance," she replied.

"Indeed," said Maria; "I hope they have done nothing to forfeit your esteem; from the little I have seen of them, I am inclined to think their acquaintance an acquisition, and should be sorry to find myself deceived; but you can, of course, decide more correctly."

"I have never been in habits of inti-

macy with the ladies," she replied; "I cannot, therefore, by any means, profess myself a judge of their merits."

"I think Miss Cremur's lover a most charming young man," rejoined Miss Elton; "there appears such a fascinating melancholy in his manner, that one cannot help feeling interested for him. I could almost envy her such a conquest; though I have heard it rumoured that her fortune is the magnet; and that his affection was bestowed on a beautiful young woman in the neighbourhood where he was educated, to whom he was many years engaged; but on re turning to England after a long voyage, and finding that she had been guilty of some improprieties during his absence, he abandoned her, and accepted the offered hand and fortune of Miss Cremur: but perhaps he has not totally conquered his partiality for this faulty girl, which may account for the great depression on his spirits."

Fortunately for Helen, Maria was now summoned

summoned to receive another party. Helen's cheeks had been alternately red and pale during the foregoing speech, and she felt almost suffocated ; her salts, however, and the use of her fan, in some measure restored to her the appearance of indifference.

She had hitherto avoided cards, unless at Lady Elvira's, she was required to make up a set ; now, however, to escape the possibility of betraying her agitation to Courtenay, she accepted an invitation to join in a rubber at Cassino : but unable to collect her ideas, she played without attention, and in half an hour found herself two guineas in debt. She was startled at the discovery : for, till then, she had not enquired for what sum they engaged. She knew that half-a-guinea was all she possessed ; for though Lady Elvira was liberal, and frequently made her handsome presents, her delicacy forbade her accepting all her generous friend offered ; and

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she

she always declared herself richer than she was. Her present dilemma was most distressing; she searched her pocket, more with a view of hiding her confusion than the hope of finding its contents.

Hartly had been stationed behind her chair for some time, and with great presence of mind he now offered to become her banker. "I do not profess myself much acquainted with ladies' apparel," said he, "but I well know that fashion has long exploded the use of pockets; your having missed your purse, therefore, is by no means an extraordinary accident."

Helen bestowed on him a look of gratitude for the apology, and was constrained to accept his offered assistance. She now requested him to take her place, to which he assented; and she walked to the table where Lady Elvira was engaged, before she perceived Courtenay, who was likewise a spectator: she immediately hastened to a distant part of the room; he followed her—

her—"Oh, Helen," said he, "these repeated accidental meetings are too much for my fortitude to support; I can no longer continue the deception; will you then allow me to open my heart to you?—Could you behold the conflicts with which it is at this moment distracted, perhaps compassion might expunge some part of the resentment which, I confess, my conduct has so justly merited."

"There can be no explanation necessary, Sir," she coolly replied; "your conduct sufficiently explains itself."

"Such an answer," said he, "my behaviour has well deserved; but do not condemn me unheard. Can you believe that heart, which you once knew to be guileless as your own, and which you helped to model, so suddenly depraved?—Oh no, Helen; the same principles, the same propensities, which your father cherished, and you approved, still glow with all their accustomed ardour."

His agitation now became so manifest,
that

that Helen feared the observation of the company.

Miss Cremur was remarkably watchful; she therefore told him that she considered the discussion of such a subject wholly unnecessary, and, in their present situation, highly improper; after which, with apparent indifference, she turned from him; and as Lady Elvira's rubber was ended, she ordered her carriage, and announced to Helen her intention to depart.

Hartly led them to the door; and while he was assisting Lady Elvira into the carriage, Courtenay, who had followed, in a low voice entreated Helen to see him the next day, in consideration of their former friendship. Helen hesitated—she knew not how to decide; and before she could sufficiently collect her ideas to answer him, Hartly returned for her. She readily availed herself of the opportunity, and giving him her hand, immediately stepped into the chaise, leaving Courtenay to draw what conclusions he pleased from her

her silence. But notwithstanding all her assumed indifference, the bare possibility of an interview with him excited the strongest anxiety.

“I wish to see him,” she thought, “but what consolation can such a meeting afford me?—He confesses himself the favoured lover of Miss Cremur; without a blush he acknowledges his perfidy; and yet he would persuade me that an explanation of his motives will regain my good opinion: but he presumes too much on my weakness and partiality for him. Whatever affection may whisper in his favour, reason and conscious rectitude shall counteract. I will harden my heart against his artful story, and treat him with the contempt he deserves.”

Thus fortified, she repeated to her friend what had passed; Lady Elvira was so strongly prejudiced against Courtenay, that she would have dissuaded her from meeting him; but sympathy for her dis-

tress prevented her from expressing her sentiments ; she saw Helen's solicitude for an explanation ; and though she believed that such an interview would only soften her heart, and render her more miserable, she had not resolution to condemn an indulgence, from which her friend evidently hoped so much.

CHAP. IX.

"Oh beware of jealousy ;

It is a green-eyed monster, which doth mock

The meat it feeds on."

SHAKESPEARE.

HELLEN arose the following morning in such a state of perturbation as Lady Elvira perceived with pain, for she feared it would too faithfully pourtray to the perfidious Courtenay the influence he still held in her heart.

"I could almost wish, my dear," said Lady Elvira, "that you would refuse to see this worthless young man; your own judgment can, however, more correctly decide

decide for you ; but let me entreat you not, for one moment, to forget his offence. He still thinks he possesses sufficient power to tamper with your affection, which you perceive he wishes to retain. I will not hint at the inference that must be drawn from his attempting to renew your partial sentiments, after the public avowal of his engagement to another."

"Oh, Lady Elvira," interrupted Helen, "you surely wrong him by such a suspicion; he cannot be so thoroughly depraved. Had you known him in the peaceful shades of Alvondown, you would not believe that all the sublime, the innocent impressions they inspired, could be so totally erased; could you then have witnessed every action of his life, and read every thought of his heart, you would not so decisively condemn him. But forgive my enthusiasm," she added, with a smile; "you will consider me a partial judge: let me, however, assure you, that though
my

my heart may suffer severely, it shall not influence my judgment."

"I hope it will not," Lady Elvira replied.

Every stranger that arrived during the day, excited in Helen a degree of agitation such as she had never before experienced. It was Percival Courtenay, the beloved friend, whose perfections her heart had cherished from her earliest childhood, that she was now to meet with indifference! after an absence which had awakened all her apprehensions for his safety, and during which she believed nothing but death could prevent their union—she was to greet his return with coldness, and assumed aversion!

How different were the sensations she had expected to feel on his arrival!—Often had she soothed her heart in the midst of its other distresses, with the anticipation of her first interview with Courtenay. She had, in idea, repeated to him all the sorrows she endured after his departure, and
had

had pleased herself with exciting the tear of sympathy at the relation. But oh, how cruelly were those flattering illusions dispelled!—He had forgotten all their former friendship; had broken all his sacred vows; and was returned the lover of her bitterest enemy.

In such reflections passed the day; and the evening was far advanced when a servant gave her the following note, and said the gentleman waited below for an answer.

“Let me conjure you to receive me; it is not the mere acquaintance of a day, but the friend, the companion of your infancy, that pleads for this indulgence. Notwithstanding appearances, conscious rectitude gives me confidence; afford me, then, this one opportunity of explaining my conduct.”

Helen

Helen read the note, and gave it to Lady Elvira, who, after perusing it, and again enjoining her friend to support a proper dignity and spirit of resentment, left her to receive the culprit alone.

In a moment she heard his footsteps at the door; it was necessary to conquer her feelings, to receive him with cold civility; but when he entered the room, and his pallid countenance bespoke the agitation of his mind, the task became doubly severe: a distant bow was, however, all she bestowed on him.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, after several fruitless efforts to speak, "is it thus we meet?—Is it thus my Helen greets my return, from so long and so perilous a voyage?"

"I should reply, that I had little reason to be interested for your safety, could your present conduct teach me wholly to forget those virtues once so highly estimated by my revered father."

"Oh, Helen, spare my feelings on this subject;

subject; ~~the~~ name of that respected friend recalls too painfully the recollection of our happy and innocent childhood—a recollection which I vainly strive to expunge.—How little did I once believe I should ever wish to lose the dear memorial! severe, indeed, is my lot. Could you now behold the anguish that distracts my heart, you would pity me, in spite of every unfavourable appearance. Let me likewise add, that however those appearances may have influenced you to my prejudice, I could convince you, that if I have erred, my head has led me astray, and that I too sensibly feel, for my future peace, that my heart remains unchanged.”

Helen still affected to listen to him with indifference.

“Helen,” he at length added, “are you really as unmoved as you appear?—Perhaps I ought to wish it, but nature is unequal to such a conquest. Those averted looks cut me to the soul.”

This pathetic address conquered her assumed

sumed apathy. It was Courtenay—her dear brother ; for such was the appellation by which he had been, in their earlier years, distinguished, that now pleaded for her compassion. A tear stole down her cheek ; she silently wiped it ; but vainly strove to check the trembling drop that followed.

Courtenay perceived it. “ Nature,” said he, while he threw himself into a chair next her, “ is above disguise ; it speaks the sincere language of the heart.—Do I live to confess, that the assurance of my Helen’s continued affection can only add to my misery !”

“ Pray give yourself no uneasiness on that subject, Sir,” said Helen, who felt her pride insulted ; “ though I cannot, in a moment, forget the pleasure which your friendship for so many years afforded me, let me assure you that my sorrow proceeds entirely from the remembrance of your former virtues, so painfully contrasted with your present degeneracy.”

“ Heaven

"Heaven and earth!" he exclaimed, hastily rising "this is too much; I cannot support the severe trial I have imposed on myself. You believe me a capricious despicable wretch, who has wantonly violated the most sacred vows, and now intrudes himself into your presence, for no purpose but to insult your feelings, and to convince you that vice is permitted to triumph over virtue." He paused, and threw on her a look expressive of the most poignant misery. "Oh, my once indulgent friend, can your heart teach you to think so hardly of me?"

"Where is my resentment and pride?" thought Helen, while hysterical sobs agitated her bosom.

Courtenay, alarmed at her evident disorder, ran to support her.

"Why is this forbidden?" he exclaimed, as he quitted her; "why, Helen, must I tear myself for ever from your sight—you, to whom my earliest vows were pledged—whose image has ever lived unrivalled

rivalled in my breast, and to whom I have solemnly betrothed myself, in presence of that Being who could register the contract in eternal records; and yet I have engaged myself to another! Do I live to tell you so?—Indeed, Helen,” he added, placing his hand on his forehead, “I fear all is not as it should be here; I came to give you an explanation of my conduct, but I am incoherent; I have said nothing in my own vindication, and yet I presume to style your just resentment cruelty. Oh, forgive my inconsistency, and look with less distrust on him whose every thought was once laid open to you!—I will endeavour to write to you; you shall then judge my conduct, and guide my future actions.”

“Courtenay,” said Helen, who could no longer support the character she had assumed, “you read my heart too correctly not to be sensible of its struggles. I am not ashamed to confess that I could not see the depravity of that being, whose

steady virtue I had taught myself to think superior to mortal frailty, without a pang. You, whose sentiments ever led me to contemplate the favourable side of human nature, have now convinced me of its imperfection. For your sake, Percival, I shall, in future, look on all mankind with distrust; for if integrity has ceased to influence the actions of him in whose breast its principle was so early instilled, and so long cherished, where shall I expect to find it?"

"God grant me patience to support these unmerited aspersions," said he; "but I have deserved them from you, Helen. I vainly hoped that by exciting your resentment, I might spare your feelings; I am now convinced of my error. Had I explained the motives which influenced my conduct, and trusted to your arbitration, how much more happy should I now feel!—that you would have decided for me as I have done for myself, I am well assured; for I know the unshaken rectitude
of

of your mind ; I should then have retained your friendship, and been strengthened by your counsel ; I have now rendered myself unworthy of both. Oh, my sister, (allow the penitent culprit to call you by that affectionate, though long-forgotten name) could you have known the bitter conflicts that tore my heart, before it thus decided on misery, you would not accuse me of inconstancy."

"What can I say to you, Courtenay?" said she ; "that countenance, which I was so long accustomed to consider the index of your mind, pleads strongly in your favour ; but would not reason and prudence condemn my weakness, if I could again permit the plausible appearance to deceive me?—Not easily can that regard, which, for so many years, seemed interwoven with my existence, be cancelled ; I still feel sufficient interest in your welfare, to wish you very happy ; but that confidence in your candour, in which my prospects of happiness once centred, is fled, never to return."

"Surely no earthly trial ever exceeded this; the highest felicity which this world can bestow is within my reach, and duty bids me resign it: a gem, whose lustre no art can sully, is offered me—nay, is mine, by the most sacred claim, and I am doomed to reject the treasure. Is there a better world?—shall we meet again in peace, relieved from the heavy burthen of corporeal misery?—Helen, you must convince me; my brain is bewildered!"

The wildness of his countenance, and fervency of his expression, alarmed her; though ignorant of the cause which influenced his conduct, she no longer believed him guilty. Two short years could never have perfected such a hypocrite; and overcome by his distress, she could not immediately speak to him.

"If my friendship can afford you consolation, Courtenay," she at length said, "believe me, you still possess it. I will not deny the sensation; your present misery is too sincere to be feigned; still, therefore,

therefore, you are my beloved brother ; by that tie, then, let me conjure you to be more composed."

" My dear generous friend, how shall I express my gratitude ?—I have imposed on your feelings ; you compassionate my misery, and even imputed guilt. Fool that I was to merit such an accusation !—but my heart shall be laid before you, when you shall judge of its deserts. I will no longer thus idly intrude on you ; adieu, then, my beloved, though injured friend ; may you meet with some being more worthy your esteem and affection than the unhappy Courtenay !"

He could not proceed ; nor were his last words intelligible. He did not, however, stay to repeat them.

He had scarcely quitted the room before Hartly entered ; he met Courtenay on the stairs, and feared that a reconciliation had taken place. Helen's evident distress, however, assured him that the meeting had not proved very consolatory.

"I fear I have intruded unseasonably on you, Miss Coleby," said he, in a softened tone; "but since I have so undesignedly offended, allow me to confess that I feel too strong an interest in your happiness, to behold this appearance of sorrow, without enquiring into its cause, and offering my services, if they can in any manner prove beneficial to you."

"I feel grateful for the friendship that dictates those kind enquiries, Sir," she replied; "and were it possible that you could afford me assistance, I would not scruple to accept it; but at present it is not required; and I assure you, the subject of my sorrow is so very painful to my feelings, that I must entreat you to spare me the confession."

"Do not believe me so impertinently curious as to wish for such an explanation; nothing but the strong interest I feel in your welfare, my amiable friend," said he, taking her hand, and respectfully kissing it,

it, " could have prevailed on me to introduce the subject."

At this moment the door opened, and Lady Elvira entered. Astonishment for a moment arrested her steps; a crimson glow, rather expressive of resentment, followed.

Helen likewise blushed; it was not a guilty suffusion; but to Lady Elvira's suspicious eye seemed to imply a conscious impropriety of conduct. Even Hartly was abashed; he attempted to apologize, but his visible confusion increased her suspicions.

In spite of superior sense, and great liberality of sentiment, Lady Elvira could not behold her favoured lover in such a situation, with a lovely and fascinating young woman, without a spark of jealousy; for though she might be numbered among the most worthy of her sex, she was still a woman, and therefore subject to mortal frailty. She endeavoured to correct her feelings, but in vain; it was impossible to

treat Helen with the entire affection she had hitherto felt for her, or to look on Hartly without some degree of resentment. She had, however, sufficient command of herself to avoid noticing their situation, well aware that the appearance of jealousy would lessen her own dignity, and perfect the triumph of her rival ; but she felt a degree of absence and reserve the whole evening towards Helen, who, unconscious of what passed in the bosom of her friend, and very soon forgetting the circumstance that caused those turbulent sensations, was surprised and hurt at her coldness.

Lady Elvira had zealously espoused her cause with respect to Courtenay ; and that she should continue so obstinately silent on the subject of their meeting, even after Hartly's departure, astonished her unhappy friend.

Helen feared that Lady Elvira blamed the lenity which so long permitted Courtenay to plead his cause ; and unequal to vindicating her conduct towards him, she
retired

retired early, hoping to be received with better humour in the morning.

With the same cold looks, and distrustful manner, however, Lady Elvira met her in the breakfast-parlour; and Helen perceived, though she knew not her offence, that she was not soon likely to be pardoned. Never before had she felt her dependent situation; and, painfully, she thought Lady Elvira tired of granting protection to so useless and insignificant a being. At this suggestion her eyes filled with tears; she used her utmost endeavours to check them, and to swallow a cup of tea, which she thought would have choked her.

Lady Elvira affected not to perceive her distress; and she wanted resolution to ask in what she had offended. Immediately after breakfast she left the room. What would she now have given to return to the humble cottage from whence Lady Elvira's generosity so lately removed her! How irksome did she feel it, to be dependent on the caprice of the great!—Mr. Mallett's bounty

never required any sacrifices. Dear good man ! he did not only lessen the sense of obligation to himself, but endeavoured to persuade her she conferred one on him. To him, too, she could apply for advice, in the full assurance that he would guide her in the right path. No pettishness, nor inequality of temper, ever interrupted the serenity of his mind. Had she, then, reason to rejoice at such an exchange ?—“ But I am ungrateful,” added she, recollecting herself ; “ Lady Elvira has been my generous friend ; and if she has a tinge of human infirmity, it is my duty to bear with it.”

She had scarcely dismissed the subject before Lady Elvira entered her room, and with her former good humour, requested she would accompany her to the Pump-room.

Helen rejoiced at this tacit reconciliation, and immediately equipped herself for the purpose.

Though Lady Elvira could not entirely
conquer

conquer her suspicions, she was conscious of the cruelty, as well as injustice, of tyrannising over an helpless creature, entirely dependent on her bounty. She perceived that Helen's sensibility was hurt at her unkindness, and she was sufficiently aware of the delicacy of her situation. These reflections awakened her tenderness, and induced her to treat Helen with her usual confidence and affection.

At the Pump-room they were joined by Lady Woolcomb, who expressed the highest satisfaction at seeing her new favourite, for whom she had more than once professed even a greater partiality than for her handsome parrot, though she had often pronounced her bird the most entertaining creature in existence.

Clifton, who was at some distance, after taking a steady survey of them through his glass, stalked up to them, to pay his compliments.

"Lady Elvira Musgrove," said he, "I am infinitely delighted to see you. Curse

me if you do not stand higher in my estimation than any of your countrywomen ; and had I not been honoured with such particular marks of favour from the lovely young nuns of Russia, on my soul I am doubtful if I might not be tempted to resign my liberty to your Ladyship."

"Your compliment is flattering in the extreme," she replied ; " particularly when I recollect the superiority of years among the perfections of the Russian nuns. No one will doubt the maturity of your taste, since none are, by the laws of the country, permitted to enter their convents till they are past fifty."

"By all that is foreign and enchanting, you are the most incredulous of your sex. How should you know the age of Russian nuns ?—or the laws of that country ?—you were never there, were you ?"

"Why no ; but there are such things as books, which inform us of those circumstances ; and in my opinion, people who wish to obtain credit for their adventures, should

should consult them, and not depend on the mere chance of finding every individual with whom they meet, as devoid of brains as themselves."

"You are severe—cursedly severe, Lady Elvira."—Then turning to Helen, by way of changing the conversation, he exclaimed—"Oh, Miss—Miss———pray assist my recollection, my dear Lady Elvira; you introduced this pretty blooming girl to me the other day as an appendage to your suite; but my memory is of too volatile a nature to fetter itself with those minute particulars."

"Your memory wishes to roam beyond the boundaries of common sense, and ~~to~~ retain impressions only of the marvellous; it would be presumptuous to attempt recalling so sublime a genius to the hackneyed path it has quitted; I would therefore recommend to you the perusal of Baron Munchausen's travels; and after the eagle of your imagination has borne you through the wonderful regions that he has
already

already traversed, if you can give as good an account of your adventures as he has done, one of those youthful nuns you have so happily described shall reward your labours."

Clifton understood no part of this speech but its conclusion, which, however, as well as the satirical smiles of the bystanders, convinced him he was the subject of their ridicule ; he therefore embraced the earliest opportunity to walk off in silence.

Helen found a letter from Courtenay on her return. This then contained an explanation of his conduct ; she retired with it, and in the utmost agitation broke the seal. The contents were as follow.

CHAP.



CHAP. X.

" ——— Yet by your patience,
I will a plain, unvarnish'd tale deliver."

SHAKESPEARE.

" **I**N the presence of my injured friend, I found it impossible to give the explanation for which I sought the interview. My mind was agitated almost to frenzy; the idea of losing you for ever was alone predominant. Must I still repeat that sentence?—Yes, Helen, the die is cast, and I am an unfortunate being, doomed to spend the remainder of my days in wretchedness. But I again wander from the subject; let me collect my thoughts, to give you a dis-
passionate

passionate detail of all that has befallen me since the ever-regretted day on which I quitted Alvondown. With what pleasure could I dwell on the sensations that filled my breast at that moment!—You witnessed them in some measure; but you were unacquainted with the ambitious hopes that flattered me. I was (in idea) already a Nabob, not by arbitrary exactions, but by industrious attention. ‘My labours will be crowned with success,’ thought I, ‘and Helen will be my reward.’—With what confidence did I anticipate the day, when, rolling in riches, I should return to claim the prize!—Those fallacious hopes restrained my immoderate sorrow, at losing your loved society. Thus sanguine are the prospects of youth, unacquainted with the world, and untamed by misfortune. But forgive those digressions—I wrote my respected guardian an account of the voyage to India, which my father had procured for me. Indifferent as he had hitherto appeared, he now called forth my warmest gratitude;

gratitude; to equip me was a great expence to him, and indeed required a much larger sum than he could command; but he was indefatigable in his exertions to procure it. It was long before he could succeed; but at last, by some means, then unknown to me, he obtained it; and with the assurance that I should shortly have an opportunity of cancelling the obligation, I departed.

“ We proceeded with prosperous gales as far as the island of Ceylon, whither we were driven by a violent storm, which baffled our utmost exertions; we saw the impossibility of saving our ship; and therefore resolved to betake ourselves to the boats, and hasten to the shore, which we reached with difficulty. But though our lives were preserved, our property was lost; for the ship sunk in less than half an hour after we quitted her.

“ Had I not then been comforted with the hope of embracing thee, my Helen, I should have wished for death. Destitute
and

and forlorn, in a strange country, what could I do?—My relation lived at Calcutta; I wrote to him immediately; but no conveyance offered by which to send my letter for more than a week. The small sum I had with me was soon spent; and I will not distress your feelings, Helen, with an account of the misery that ensued.—When life was nearly at its last ebb, a humane Englishman discovered and relieved me; but he possessed only a liberal heart, without the ability of following its dictates. As soon as his generous bounty had recruited my strength, I requested him to use his interest to procure me some employment; but all his applications were unsuccessful. He was himself in a very inferior situation, and had neither power nor interest to befriend me.

“I had written an account of my disastrous voyage to my cousin, and waited in anxious expectation of his answer. Many weeks passed away; and I ventured to address him a second time: another anxious month

month succeeded, when my two letters were returned, enclosed in a cover, which informed me that the gentleman to whom they were addressed had been dead some months. It is unnecessary to describe my feelings at this unexpected intelligence; I had no resource left but to work my passage home, and to cheer my drooping spirits with the hope of finding my native country more indulgent: for this purpose I applied to every homeward-bound ship, but my services were always rejected. I was questioned respecting my knowledge in the nautical line; and I believe it was feared that I should not win my bread.

“Thus baffled in every attempt, my sanguine hopes began to vanish; and forgive me, Helen, if I confess that I murmured at the severity of my lot, and dared to arraign the justice of my Maker. In this gloomy temper of mind I flew to solitude, and had once allowed discontent and despair so far to unman me, as to meditate suicide. I even addressed letters to my
father,

father, and my venerable tutor; and had placed the sheet before me to bid a last adieu to you, my Helen—but at that instant, your image, like a guardian angel, hovered over me. I saw your reception of my letter; instead of the tear of affection, which I flattered myself my death, in any other circumstances, would occasion, you frowned, and declared your once-loved Courtenay unworthy a place in your memory.

“Such a retrospect recalled my senses, and I shuddered at beholding the precipice on which I had stood. I recollected that we were not created for this world alone; and that, however severe our trials, they were inflicted by an indulgent Father, who certainly consulted our ultimate good.—Such reflections strengthened my mind; I burnt my letters, and resolved to support my misfortunes with firmness and resignation.

“Thus fortified, I returned to the town of Candy, where I had before resided; I
there

there found a packet of letters from England. 'This, then,' thought I, 'is a reward for the conquest I have obtained over my feelings.'—I kissed the seal, and dared to hope it enclosed a letter from you; for I had addressed you by the same packet that communicated my ill fortune to my father: but guess my disappointment when I discovered one letter only, and that directed in an unknown hand!—How did its contents aggravate my misery!—it informed me that my father was imprisoned for the sum with which he had furnished me. Miss Cremur was his creditor; and as he had appropriated her money to his own use without the consent of her other guardian, that gentleman determined to punish him with the utmost severity of the law. She was now become of age, and had therefore power to withdraw her claim, which however she refused to do, except at my intercession.

"I was given to understand that she had long honoured me with her partial sentiments,

ments, and that she now availed herself of the opportunity of shewing me the disinterested affection she felt for me; that she would readily pay for my passage home, and immediately liberate my father from the horrors of confinement, if I would reward her with my hand on my return to England. My heart was not bargained for, Helen; they well knew that was not in my power to bestow. Shocked at her meanness and indelicacy, I flung the letter from me, and swore I would perish rather than prostitute myself so basely. A few lines on the other side of the sheet, which had, till then, escaped my observation, induced me to pick it up; they were written by my father, and were almost illegible. These were the words:—

‘Percival, I dare not expect the sacrifice from you which this letter requires. I have been a sad fellow, and have rendered
5 myself

myself unworthy the sacred name of father: a short time will now terminate my wretched existence; confined to this unwholesome cell, I shall soon languish out my life. It is for the sum with which I furnished you, my boy, that I am now imprisoned; but never grieve for me—I have deserved punishment from you: return then, and be happy with your Helen; nor let the recollection of your worthless old father's fate be an alloy to your felicity. Accept my blessing; and may you enjoy uninterrupted prosperity, when my existence shall be forgotten, or remembered only with contempt. Beware, my son, of treading in my steps; but it is unnecessary to caution you—my miserable example will be ever strikingly present to your imagination.'

“Is it necessary to appeal to your feelings, Helen, on this occasion?—The conflict

flict that followed was severe in the extreme: my father's life seemed to depend on my decision. Though he had formerly neglected me, was it for a child to prove obdurate, and accelerate the death of him

- who gave him existence?—I shrunk with horror from the idea; and asked myself if I could bestow happiness on my Helen, or myself, when, by fulfilling my engagement to her, I condemned the author of my being to perpetual imprisonment. But oh, my friend, when I recollected that in resigning the promised blessing that had hitherto animated all my hopes, I sealed not only my own misery, but yours, I again wavered—were there no possible means of cancelling the debt, without so severe a sacrifice?—Again I perused the letter, and found the amount of the sum to be five thousand pounds. I had no prospect of ever possessing so much; and could I even look forward to the accumulation of a fortune by my industry, the means were distant; and long ere they could

could be procured, my father might sleep in dust; and though, by undermining his constitution, and wasting his substance in excess, the world might exculpate me for leaving him to his fate, would conscience be so easily appeased?—would not its reproaches haunt my most blissful moments, and whisper—‘While thou art enjoying thy portion of this world’s goods, thy wretched parent lingers out the remnant of his days in want and misery;’—and could I forget that for me the sacrifice was made?—No, Helen, we could never have approached the sacred altar under such evil auspices.

“Thus my resolution fluctuated; the friend whom I have already mentioned, endeavoured to soothe me; he feared for my intellects. Heaven, however, supported me, and duty at length prevailed. I accepted the large bills that were enclosed in the letter, and declared my acquiescence to their plan. What a prospect did my return to England now afford me!—I turned

sick at the first view of its white cliffs, and hid myself in my cabin. The congratulations that were exchanged among the other passengers, on their safe return to this happy isle, was poison to my ears.—

‘They all return to embrace some beloved expecting friend,’ thought I, ‘who will greet their arrival with heartfelt pleasure—comforts from which I alone am excluded.’

“You will easily guess that so desponding a being was universally shunned. Those in possession of high animal spirits, and prosperous circumstances, are little inclined to check the exultation of their mirth by associating with the distressed.—The gloom occasioned by internal misery is a reproach to their vivacity, and they are impatient at its presence. Thus I was left unmolested to indulge my solitary reflections.—But I shall weary even you, my Helen, with my egotism and prolixity; let me then hasten to a conclusion. I landed, and immediately sought my father, whom

whom my acquiescence had already liberated from his confinement. His health was improved, and I hoped his life reformed. I had the satisfaction of hearing him condemn with severity his former errors; and if I have been the means of reclaiming him, Helen, ought not the conviction to be my reward?—Oh, my friend, in a better world it will prove so, but in this nature is refractory.

“Thus far my conduct, I am assured, wants no apology; but my reserve to you can you so easily forgive?—I acknowledge the decision to have been erroneous; but the motive was good. I thought resentment would obliterate your affection for me, and in that hope I determined to perfect the sacrifice, and endure the misery of losing your esteem to spare your feelings; but nature has prevailed; I saw you by accident, and with sincerity, I confess that that moment exceeded all my former conflicts. I was distracted for an interview; I have obtained it, and derived a melancholy

consolation from your generous sympathy. Your consent to receive this explanation has relieved my heart of half its burthen. I will make no asseverations respecting the truth of my narrative, but trust to your former reliance on your Courtenay's veracity. I will hope for an answer; my mind is still tormented with doubts. When I think on the awful ceremony that is about to be performed, I shrink with horror from the perspective, for shall I not perjure myself at the altar?—Will not the dreaded union be a profanation of my most solemn vows?—Write to me, my friend, and endeavour to strengthen my wavering senses; indeed I am at times wholly overcome, and almost fear my reason will forsake me. Tell me likewise how you are circumstanced with your present friend: I am told she has settled an yearly stipend on you for life; if the account is true, it lessens the heaviest portion of my misery; but if not, and you are destitute—oh, my God, Helen! am I not bound to protect you?—
and

and could I, even to support a parent, abandon you to such a situation?—You have now my whole heart disclosed to you; treat me according to your opinion of my deserts, but do not, by contemptuous silence, add to the afflictions of your sincere, though unhappy

“PENCIVAL COURTENAY.”

“Contemptuous silence!” thought Helen; “oh, Courtenay, I must be savage, indeed, not to commiserate your sufferings. Your virtue is severely tried, but its constancy will one day meet its just reward.”

It was impossible for Helen to obey Lady Elvira’s summons to dinner, and on sending word she was unwell, the latter visited her. The cause was soon explained—Helen gave her the letter, which she could not peruse without being sensibly affected.

“How erroneous has been my opinion

of this unfortunate young man!" said she, when she had concluded; "this language must be sincere; hypocrisy could never paint the feelings of the heart so affectingly; however, as an impartial judge, I shall seek a further confirmation of his account. Was I not aware of Mrs. Ashton's inventive malice, I should ask how it happened that no letter reached you, from the time Courtenay left England?—and how his father's imprisonment could be kept such an entire secret at Alvondown, where he was so well known? but her indefatigable watchfulness, and active vigilance, can execute every malignant plan which she undertakes. Do you think Mr. Mallett acquainted with the circumstances attending this diabolical plot?"

Helen could only reply, that she did not wish for a stronger conviction than Courtenay's veracity afforded, which she had known too long to doubt. Lady Elvira, however, addressed Mr. Mallett on the subject, and received the following answer.

"For

“ For the sake of the ill-fated young man for whom you appear interested, I could wish to contradict his assertion—but fruitless is such a wish. His worthless father, after a life of profligacy, has now consented to sacrifice his generous son to his ease; the most diabolical plan that ever demons formed has been concerted to undo him. Old Courtenay was imprisoned at Miss Cremur’s suit; his disposition was too phlegmatic to be worked upon by mild correctives; a stronger dose was therefore administered, to awaken his lethargic faculties. Terrified at the threat of perpetual confinement, he consented to submit entirely to the direction of his persecutors, on their promising that by so doing he should be liberated.—The whole of this transaction was carried on with the greatest secrecy, that Helen might impute her lover’s inconstancy to no motive but preference for her worthless rival.

rival. That Courtenay's letters to our young friend were intercepted by the machinations of that fiend, Mrs. Ashton, we cannot be surprised. Old Courtenay is now returned to his residence in this neighbourhood ; I have expostulated with him on the injustice of his conduct ; but it is vain to expect liberality from a pusillanimous wretch, who has not spirit to *relish* vice, nor to support its consequent punishment. Forgive my asperity—I know it ill becomes me ; but I cannot feel unruffled, when virtue is thus sacrificed to craft and wickedness. We can draw but one conclusion from such events, which is, that the day of retribution must come, and the guilty be called to a severe account ; vice may reign triumphant here, but it shall meet its true reward hereafter. Few young men of the present age possess such estimable qualities as Percival. Filial affection is seldom found so strong a principle where a parent, by his misconduct, has forfeited his claim to affection ; but his tender conscience

conscience urges him to govern his actions by its dictates, though, in so doing, he has to contend with feelings so acutely sensitive, that I dread their effect on his health and reason. He is the protector I would chuse for Helen; and surely, by every tie, divine and human, she is entitled to his protection; and their habits and dispositions are so congenial, that nature seems to have formed them for each other; but, for the present, happiness is withheld from them. How does the dear girl support the trial?—Should she wish to withdraw from the gaiety of her present life till her spirits have recovered some degree of tranquillity, tell her I will joyfully receive her. With sincere wishes both for her and your Ladyship's happiness, allow me to subscribe myself

“Your Ladyship's

“respectful and obliged friend;

“JOHN MALLETT.”

As soon as Helen could sufficiently compose her spirits, she addressed the following answer to Courtenay :—

“ It is unnecessary to describe the effect of your letter, Courtenay; you, who have so long known my heart, cannot believe it insensible to your distress: but why did you conceal from me the motives that actuated your conduct?— You say you thought that resentment would lessen the severity of my sufferings—surely you never felt the sensation, or you would not have wished to excite it in the bosom of your poor Helen. It is no difficult task to submit to misfortunes inflicted by the hand of Providence; and even had death deprived me of your society, I think I could have supported the irrevocable decree with fortitude. I should have derived a melancholy satisfaction from retracing the hours of happiness I had
passed

passed in your society, and from anticipating that future intercourse from which my own faults alone could exclude me. I likewise think, that had a self-inflicted penance been imposed, I could have fulfilled the task with firmness; that sentiment, which lives in every breast, and which, if I may be allowed the expression, I shall term laudable pride, supports the mind to perform its duty; and when the sacrifice of every selfish consideration is the conquest required, exerts our strongest energies; and though, at times, the softer feelings of nature may claim their influence, conscience bestows a balm, which if it cannot cure, greatly alleviates the anguish of the wound. Might I not, too, in such circumstances, have hoped for my reward in the world of spirits, where our finite comprehensions teach us to expect happiness from the society of those whom we have loved on earth?—But how can resentment comfort an afflicted heart—that baleful, tormenting passion, which unfits us for

the joys of this world, or the next? Instead of deriving consolation from the soothing retrospect of former friendship, its effect, from the contrast, becomes insupportable; and to find that being, whom the partial imagination has adorned with every virtue of which human nature is capable, fallen so far below it, is a painful and mortifying sensation. But these reflections are foreign to the subject; the purpose of my addressing you is to applaud the rectitude of your principles, and to assure you that I reverence them most sincerely, whatever may be my feelings; that they are most acute, I will not deny; for it is unnatural to suppose I could, after having so long, and so decidedly bestowed my heart on you, Courtenay, behold you united to another with indifference. But on this subject I dare not proceed—it is too dangerously fascinating; let me rather endeavour to fortify you by precept, if not by example. The task of steeling you against the pleadings of your affection will be sufficiently

sufficiently arduous; I need not encrease the difficulty by describing mine. But how presumptuous is such an attempt from me! You, Courtenay, who from your earliest years have made it your study to correct your heart, and to subdue every evil propensity, can you apply to me for advice?—indeed you overrate my abilities; but since affection causes the error, it may surely be forgiven: and as you tell me it is in my power to comfort you, it would be cruel to refuse the attempt. You talk of perjuring yourself at the sacred altar; do not, by such an opinion, render the event more gloomy than it might otherwise prove. I can read the struggles between duty and inclination which distract your breast; in subduing the latter, you are performing your duty. Our wishes may be virtuous; but if no impediments intervene to require a sacrifice, there can surely be no merit in their completion. We are negatively innocent, if I may so express myself,

5

myself, because we have no temptation to be guilty ; and though we have reason to feel grateful for the amiable propensities implanted in us by nature, we have no opportunity of exercising the nobler powers of the mind. It is in the hour of severe trial only that we appear what we really are. It is your lot, my friend, to be thus proved ; and though the conflict is now most painful, the superior firmness of your mind will support you ; you will never repent your present decision, though unpleasant events should occur, for you will recollect that with me you could not have been happy. And for myself, Courtenay, not even your eloquence should have induced me to accept your hand under your present circumstances. Feel no uneasiness with respect to my situation, for I am with a worthy friend, who will not desert me.— To pay you the trite, cold compliment of wishing you happy with Miss Cremur, would be to insult your feelings : and yet,

Courtenay,

Courtenay, I pray most fervently, most anxiously for your happiness. I have not selfishly loved you, nor could any circumstance but your imputed unworthiness lessen my interest in your favour. Accept, then, my warmest friendship; and allow me to subscribe myself

“ Your affectionate sister,

“ HELEN COLEBY.”



CHAP. XI.

"Kind rest, perhaps, may hush my woes a little ;
Oh for that quiet sleep that knows no morning."

THOMSON.

ON the evening before Courtenay's departure with his destined bride and her friends for Alvondown, the above epistle was presented to him. "Oh, my God!" thought he, as he perused it, "are these the sensations of a bridegroom?—are these the sensations I once expected to experience from such an approaching event?—How are my prospects changed!—Helen was the prize I sought to win; her ingenuous and virtuous sentiments could never satiate;

satiate ; oh, she is a reward far above my deserts !”

Unable to support such reflections, he quitted his lodging, and wandered through the streets, without knowing whither he intended to bend his steps ; he inadvertently entered the street in which Lady Elvira resided.

“ In this house is centered all that can be valuable to me on earth,” he thought, as he mournfully looked on the building. The spot seemed to rivet him, till the gay faces, and sprightly conversations of the passengers interrupted his cogitations, and shewed him the folly of indulging them at such a place. He painfully contrasted their feelings with his own, at least as far as external observation could determine.

He was not sufficiently collected on the present occasion to moralize, or he would have remembered that boisterous mirth is no proof of peace within, and is too often assumed to hide the canker-worm of care, whose gnawings devour the heart, while deceitful smiles illumine the countenance.

As

As he proceeded, he recollected that he had engaged to spend the evening with Mrs. Ashton, and he walked slowly on towards her dwelling; but as he approached the door, he hesitated. "This evening," he thought, "is sacred to my Helen; even duty cannot refuse this last sad indulgence." He returned, and at length entered his own apartment. "Why may I not visit her?" he asked himself; "I am the brother and friend of her infancy; the interview cannot add to my own wretchedness, and perhaps she expects me."

The moment this idea presented itself, he hastened to Lady Elvira's, and enquired for Miss Coleby? He was told she was from home. Disappointed in this last hope, he again returned to his lodging; and as he felt unwell, he drank a glass of wine to revive his spirits; he thought it had a good effect, and he took a second; a third was taken to drink Helen's health, and as he swallowed it hastily, and had scarcely eaten any thing for the day, it affected his head; he, however, felt happier, and
therefore

therefore continued to drink till he had finished the bottle. His usual temperance was so uniform, that such a quantity would, at another time, have disordered his senses, and it now entirely overcame him; he sunk on the floor, where he spent the night in a profound sleep; such a cessation of misery he had not experienced for many months.

At nine o'clock the succeeding morning they were to depart for Alvondown. Mrs. Ashton's family were punctual to the hour—breakfast waited till ten, but Courtenay was not arrived. What could detain him?

Miss Cremur, who had lived in a continual state of alarm lest Helen should regain her influence on his heart, now felt increased apprehensions that her suspicions were realized. He had not fulfilled his appointment the preceding evening, which corroborated her opinion.

Mrs. Ashton could say little to console her, for the same idea suggested itself to her mind: she, however, determined to discover

discover the cause of his neglect, and for that purpose went to his lodging. She was surprised to hear that he had not left his room ; and a sneer which accompanied the servant's answer when she enquired for him, convinced her there was something amiss ; she therefore resolved to satisfy her curiosity, and accordingly hastened to the door of his sitting-room, at which she knocked with such violence as to awaken every occupier of the first and second floor, whose senses the poppy-shedding god still held in durance, and effectually roused Courtenay from his state of insensibility.

He hastily arose, but had scarcely time to recollect the occasion of his being so circumstanced, before she was in the room. The bottle and glass, which were still on the table, sufficiently declared the nature of his complaints, for that he was disordered was very apparent.

"Is this the sober Mr. Percival Courtenay ?" she asked with an illnatured sneer ;
"your friends are undoubtedly grateful
for

for the rational entertainment you have preferred to their society."

"You cannot censure my conduct with more severity than I do, Mrs. Ashton," he replied, while he placed his hand on his forehead; "believe me, I feel too sensibly the effect of this excess to need reprehension."

"Poor Sophia!" said Mrs. Ashton, turning from him, without appearing to attend to his answer; "how I pity her misplaced attachment! Had she listened to my advice, she would not have exposed the generous weakness of her heart to one so insensible of its worth."

"I am neither ungrateful nor insensible, Mrs. Ashton," he replied, in a grave voice, "nor am I in a humour to bear such reflections. I will be ready to attend you in an hour; and in the mean time, the arrangements necessary for my journey require my assistance; I must therefore, for the present, wish you a good morning."

He

He then retired to his room, where he threw himself on the bed, with the hope of relieving his distracted head, before he prepared to accompany the ladies.

Mrs. Ashton swelled with resentment at Courtenay's cavalier treatment; and could she have supposed that the dissolution of his engagement with Sophia would have given him pain, she would not (from compassion to the dear child's feelings, whose cause she professed she had so disinterestedly espoused) have scrupled to execute such a design; but she well knew how Courtenay's heart was bestowed; she therefore judged that though duty had induced him to sacrifice his happiness, he would scarcely regret a circumstance which would thus realize his wishes without his own exertions: but if she concealed her indignation, she had by no means conquered it; nor could she deny herself the satisfaction of repeating to Sophia what had happened.

"We now no longer wonder," she added,

added, "at his attachment for Helen ; they were, I doubt not, jovial companions for many years."

At that moment, Mrs. Ashton really forgot that she was, herself, the sole inventor of such a scandalous insinuation respecting Helen.

They were obliged to wait another hour for the tardy swain, who, however, at length made his appearance, and they departed in a coach for Alvondown.

Miss Cremur was not highly gratified by the attention of her lover, whose aching head and afflicted heart counteracted all his efforts to appear cheerful.

Harriet Ashton was wholly absorbed in efforts to compose an impromptu, which she intended to repeat on her first view of Alvondown ; but her muse continued inexorable ; and though she had been successful in the composition of one line—

" Hail, peaceful village, ever hallow'd shade——"

it was fated to remain in solitude.

Thus

Thus they proceeded several miles in profound silence. Harriet at length hastily drew her tablets a second time, and forgetting she was not alone, exclaimed, with emphasis—“ Ade—blade—slade—made—let me see, no, fade—ah, now I have it—

“ Hail, peaceful village, ever hallow'd shade,
Whose blooming beauties never yet could fade.”

Even Courtenay could not repress a smile at this soliloquy. “ I admire your poetical taste,” said he; “ that faded part of the couplet is highly characteristic; is it the village we now see, whose romantic beauties you have undertaken to celebrate ?”

Harriet was thoroughly disconcerted at this speech, which completely roused her from her reverie, and cruelly put to flight the pleasing idea of surprising her companions with her poetical fluency, on the moment of beholding her native village.—She however endeavoured to recover her presence of mind; and profiting by Courtenay's

tenay's hint, replied, that it certainly was her admiration of the present spot that had instigated the poetical effort.

A laugh from all her companions obliged her to take her eyes from the paper; and on Sophia's remarking that it was quite a burlesque on poetry to make such a dismal place the subject of her verse, she looked from the window, and beheld a few scattered cottages, in a dirty, ruinous condition, and devoid of every prospect that could afford pleasure to the beholder. She was now obliged to confess the absence of her thoughts from the present scene; and so effectually was she chagrined at the discovery, that all further attempts were, for the present, discouraged, and she proceeded to Alvondown in silence, leaving to some more fortunate poetess the pleasing task of celebrating its perfections.

With what sensations did Courtenay return to this once-loved spot!—How did every scene recal the recollection of his youthful happiness!—The Vicarage-House

“Say no more on the subject of your disinterested affection, my friend,” said Harriet; “I blush for the sentiments I have heard you express; they are natural, I confess, but ought to be carefully concealed, or you will lose all pretensions to the title of heroine; for what female, so dignified, ever experienced a natural feeling?”

Sophia protested that she felt no ambition to deserve such an appellation; the reproof was therefore unnecessary: and in no very pleasant humour did either of the ladies reach her habitation.

Percival had quitted the coach to indulge the reflections that weighed on his afflicted heart, at thus entering the beloved village of Alvondown. “Here,” thought he, as he approached an eminence that commanded a view of the Vicarage, “I have often strolled with my H len, to admire the setting sun, when it faintly gilded the distant hills. On this spot how often has she rested on my arm, after an excursion

sion

sion in pursuit of nature's curious productions, while her expressive eyes have been turned towards me, in expectation of my determining the class to which some newly-discovered flower belonged!—Oh, how extatic is the pleasure of instructing a mind like hers!—Those sacred moments of happiness can never return!—never must I again behold that dear, that innocent face, brightened with the smiles of genuine heart-felt cheerfulness!—never shall I recollect a moment of my past life, unmingled with sensations of the bitterest anguish.”

Such reflections threw Courtenay into an agony little short of frenzy; he hastened onward, and, without design, entered Mr. Mallett's garden.

The good man was watering some of his choicest flowers, and did not notice the entrance of Courtenay, till he had nearly approached him; the wildness of his look, and his total silence alarmed Mr. Mallett, who feared that his intellects had really suffered; he immediately dropped his wa-

tering-pot, and taking his hand, accosted him with the most friendly tenderness.

The manner in which he spoke softened the perturbed emotions of Courtenay, who, at length relieved by a flood of tears, answered Mr. Mallett's kind enquiries, and complied with his earnest entreaties to accompany him to the house. Every step presented some new object to distress Courtenay's feelings; but ashamed of the extreme weakness he had betrayed, he endeavoured to combat its effect, and in some degree apparently succeeded.

Mr. Mallett engaged him on indifferent subjects; and Percival feared to introduce the one most interesting to himself. After spending an hour, therefore, with Mr. Mallett, he left him, and proceeded to his father's, without once allowing the well-known scenes through which he passed to dwell on his mind.

Old Mr. Courtenay was at supper when Percival arrived; and after welcoming him to Alvondown, and inviting him to partake, he

he returned to the important business which his son's arrival had a few moments interrupted, without noticing his altered looks, or refusal to eat.

"I am glad to find you so comfortably settled, Sir," said Percival, who had taken a seat at some distance from the table.

"Why, tolerably decent, Percival; I think, considering all the wayward circumstances that assailed me, thanks to the donor; for which, by the bye, I am to acknowledge myself indebted to your pretty face: had it not been for such an attraction, I believe my old-fashioned phiz would scarcely have been estimated worth the ransom. Success has overtaken us at last, my boy; let us shew our gratitude, then, by enjoying fortune's favours while they are in our possession; but it is right to make all sure as we go. The settlements are made all but signing; and nothing remains to be performed but the ceremony. Here, then, goes a bumper to the bride-elect—eh, Percival?—What, moping still,

my boy?—why you look more like a man six weeks after marriage than a happy favoured lover.”

“Forgive me, Sir, this depression on my spirits I cannot conquer; indeed I am not well, and to-day’s journey has added to my indisposition.”

“I am sorry you are ill,” rejoined his father, at the same time helping himself to a plate of hashed venison, “particularly at such a critical time; but perhaps a night’s rest will recover you. Shall I send for an apothecary?”

Percival declined the offer, and followed a servant to the apartment prepared for him, where he laid his aching head on the pillow, though with little hope of benefiting from its soporific qualities.

When Mr. Courtenay’s supper was removed, and he had drank half his bottle of wine, he sent to enquire how his son found himself, and whether he would not like some refreshment?—and on being answered that Mr. Percival continued very
much

much indisposed, but did not chuse to take any thing, he quietly finished the remainder, and retired for the night, without having his slumbers much disturbed by the altered appearance or complaints of his son.

Not for one moment could Percival forget his pain, for sleep was a stranger to his eyes; and though he felt rather worse in the morning, he could no longer endure the still solitude of his chamber; he therefore arose with the sun, and strayed to that cliff on which he had clasped his Helen to his heart, before his departure from Alvondown. Again the agony of the preceding evening returned; he endeavoured to collect his wavering senses, but in vain—passion was alone predominant; and he flung himself on the spot where he had formerly indulged those flattering visions of expected happiness that were now so cruelly destroyed.

In this situation he was found by Mr. Mallett, who was always an early riser; he seated himself beside his afflicted young friend,

friend, and endeavoured to mitigate the violence of those transports, the effects of which he so greatly dreaded.

The interest he so evidently felt in his welfare was a consoling balm to the heart of Courtenay, who almost persuaded himself that in the sentiments of this kind friend were revived those of his ever-regretted tutor ; and the affection and respect he so many years felt for Mr. Coleby, he now, in a great measure, experienced for his worthy successor, whose importunities to accompany him to the Vicarage, Percival complied with. He was likewise prevailed on to partake of the good man's breakfast, which was the first morsel he had swallowed since he left Bath. Mr. Mallett's conversation was instructive as well as soothing, and he staid to enjoy it till his father's hour of dinner. .

CHAP. XII.

"Oh, 'tis too much!—I cannot bear the conflict."

THOMSON.

WALKING from the Vicarage to his father's, Percival met old Agnes; but, absorbed in his own reflections, he would have passed her unnoticed, had she not exclaimed—"Alack-a-day, Master Percival Courtenay, what, is poor old Agnes grown out of knowledge?"

"Ah, my old friend," said he, holding out his hand, "I am rejoiced to see you look so well."

"My dear young gentleman, but I cannot say the same of you," replied Agnes,

K. 6

sorrowfully

sorrowfully shaking her head; " your looks are sadly altered indeed : but every thing is changed since you went away, I think ; poor dear Miss Helen !—oh, Master Percival, if it was not that you look so sorrowful, I could tell you a piece of my mind. I never could have thought when you took on so at parting with her, that you would have *sarved* her so badly."

" Forbear, my good Agnes," exclaimed Courtenay, with earnestness, " to touch on that subject ; and pray that your dear Miss Helen may be happier than he whom you accuse of betraying her can ever hope to be." "

" God bless you, Sir, forgive me," said Agnes, frightened at the emotion she had excited ; " Heaven knows I meant no harm ; but I do love you both so well, and thought you used to agree so like chickens, that it is a thousand pities you should be parted : and for that little ill-conditioned imp, Miss Cremur, too, that used to make such

such strife between you and Miss Helen
——”

“Hush, hush, Agnes,” said Courtenay, with encreased agitation, “you must not talk to me thus.”

“Ah, Sir, it is a sore subject; aye, and it is a hard lot for poor Miss Helen; but Heaven will one day reward her for all she has suffered.”

Courtenay was unable to reply; Agnes's last words were an additional pang to his heart.

Dinner waited for him at his father's.—
“Oh, Percival,” said the old man, “I am glad to see you at last; the turkey is half spoiled though by your tardiness. By the bye, it was not very kind of you to run away from your poor old father so soon, especially as you cannot plead a visit to your lady as an excuse. I naturally went to Mrs. Ashton's to enquire for you; but every body there appeared in the dumps: and as they could give me no good account of you, I hastened home to make some alterations.

terations in my bill of fare. But how is it you are so neglectful, Percival, to your intended bride?—I fear you still feel a hankering after Coleby's daughter; I am sure I sincerely wish you had never known the old hypocrite."

"Hypocrite and Mr. Coleby!" repeated Percival, while the colour flew to his cheek; "it is the first time his venerable name was ever insulted by such an epithet."

"Is it, Percival?—Well, then, it shall be the last. I did not mean to affront you. But come, dinner waits, let us adjourn, and for the present forget all unpleasant recollections, and enjoy the comforts within our reach."

Percival followed his father to the eating-room in silence, and endeavoured to partake of the expensive repast before him; but had his health and appetite been good, the conviction of his father's imprudence, in again launching into such extravagance, would have prevented his enjoying it; feeling, as he now did, the few morsels he

obliged himself to swallow, almost choked him.

Mr. Courtenay pressed him to eat, but finding he could not succeed, he recollected his indisposition. "You have not recovered your fatigue," said he, noticing, for the first time, his pallid countenance; "upon my soul, you look very ill; we will get some advice, for it will be doubly distressing to have you laid up by indisposition before the ceremony can be performed."

"No matter how soon after, I believe," said Percival, with a faint smile.

"I did not say so; no, no, Percival, Heaven preserve your life and health for many, many years; I have reason to pray for it, for you are a noble young fellow after all, and treat me ten times better than I deserve. Come, here's a bumper to your prosperity, in which you shall pledge me, if you have not quarrelled with everything my house affords."

"There was something affecting to Percival's

cival's feelings in this speech; he felt his eyes moisten; and to conceal the appearance of sorrow, he filled his glass. The feverish thirst which his agitation had produced, was relieved by the draught, and he repeated it as frequently as his father desired. His head was now in such a state that it soon became giddy, and he had scarcely finished his seventh glass before his senses forsook him, and he fell on the floor.

"What a poor milksop it is!" said his father; "I could have finished seven bottles when I was his age, without being so much affected. This is a sorry seasoning; however, I live in hopes that his head will harden by perseverance, as mine has done."

He then rang the bell for a servant to conduct Percival to his apartment: it was not without great difficulty that this task could be performed. At length, however, he was thrown across his bed; and the man who had conveyed him thither descended to relate to his fellow-servants
the

the cause of Mr. Percival's disorder, declaring that he had drank five bottles of wine for his own share. The servants lifted their hands in astonishment at the relation, and pitied Miss Cremur, who was going to sacrifice herself to such a drunkard.

While the subject was discussing, Mrs. Ashton knocked at the door, and William was constrained to leave his half-finished tale to admit the visitor. Her first enquiry was for Percival.

"He is very ill, Madam," replied the man, with a half-concealed laugh.

"Very ill!" repeated Mrs. Ashton, while she bestowed a scrutinizing look on the countenance of her informer; "has he been seized suddenly?"

"Y-es—yes—Ma-am," replied William, "rather suddenly, I think, after dinner."

Mrs. Ashton, who immediately divined the nature of his complaint, without further enquiry left the house.

"This lover of yours, my dear Sophia," she exclaimed, the moment she entered her

her own house, "is a mere beast; he is no longer the sober young man you have been accustomed to respect and admire for his virtue, but a confirmed drunkard; his father tells me that he has been in a state of intoxication ever since he entered the house; and that he has this day drank no less a quantity than seven bottles of port, the effect of which it is unnecessary to repeat."

"How greatly have I been deceived in him!" replied Sophia, with a sigh; "I wish I did not love him so well. Suppose I was to threaten him with the loss of my favour—do you think there could be any danger of Helen's accepting him?"

"Yes, to be sure, she would accept him with joy. She first initiated him in this vice; and it would be strange indeed if she refused him for possessing an accomplishment so much to her heart's wish. No, no, my dear, you shall have him at all events; but since we have discovered his weakness, we must make the best advantage of
of

of it we can. We will get the settlements drawn up wholly in your favour, and persuade him to sign them when he has sufficiently drowned his senses to be incapable of detecting the imposition; for I know he will otherwise seek to drive a hard bargain in behalf of his father, who, upon the whole, ought to suffer for his treachery."

"You do not mean to have me put the law in force against him after I am married to Percival, Madam?"

"Why not, child?—it is time the old villain should meet with his deserts; for if he is permitted to retain his liberty, he will certainly share your fortune: and depend on it, if such is the case, he will soon ruin you; for Percival is a poor chicken-hearted fellow, and will supply his father's wants, if he scruples to squander your property on himself."

"But I fear Percival would hate me if I acted so deceitfully; and I am sure I would
consent

consent to lose half my fortune rather than forfeit his love."

"Oh, my dear, you are a stranger to the world, or you would not place love in competition with fortune. Love will not maintain you, nor buy you a new hat or gown when you want it; love may be a very pretty plaything, but will prove a most unsubstantial livelihood."

"True, Madam; and I cannot say I should like to be debarred from purchasing new clothes when I wanted them; besides, my old ones might not happen to become me, and they would grow unfashionable; and then, of course, Percival would not like me," added she, viewing her figure in the glass with great complacency; "but indeed I could not bear to imprison old Mr. Courtenay; and what would the world say, if I was to punish my husband's father?"

"Well, my dear, if you do not put the law in force, it will be very right to keep the
the

the power entirely in your own hands, because you may be liberal or not, as occasions offer; besides, to keep Percival in such a state of dependence will be the surest means of making him respectful to you."

Sophia relished this proposal, which they accordingly agreed to put in execution.

Unconscious of all that passed, Percival slept away the evening, and great part of the night; but the moment he awoke, his feelings confessed the debauch of the preceding day. "Twice, in the course of a very few days, have I degraded myself," thought he; "how nearly is man on a level with the brute creation, when he thus divests himself of his native dignity!—Oh, shameful deprivation of that boasted superiority we possess!—Never shall a momentary gratification betray me into a similar error. If dissipation were ever excusable, it might be so in my wretched situation; but though circumstances may palliate my conduct, they cannot exculpate me;

me ; and if I know myself, I will be callous to every future temptation."

It was late when he arose ; his father rallied him on his weak head, and sought to comfort him by an assurance that a few years experience in the society of choice spirits would harden him to a more man-like firmness.

Percival gravely shook his head ; he feared to speak, lest he should, in too harsh terms, declare his detestation of his father's conduct and sentiments. Percival now recollected his palpable inattention to Miss Cremur and her companions, whom he had not seen since his arrival.

Mrs. Ashton could, with great difficulty, conceal her indignant feelings at the mortifying contempt he appeared to entertain for her. She received him with great coldness, and ventured to drop more than one hint respecting his disorder the preceding evening.

Percival bit his lips with vexation when the subject was introduced ; for his heart confessed

confessed that he well deserved the reproof. He now endeavoured to compensate for the want of gallantry his behaviour had hitherto evinced. The die was irrevocably cast; he had nothing, therefore, to do but to strengthen his mind to support the trial with resolution.

Mr. Mallett's constant advice had a great effect in tranquillizing the turbulence of his emotions, and he began to hope that it might not be impossible to expand the sentiments of Sophia's heart, and render it more congenial with his own; but this effort remained to be tried, till she had quitted the tuition of Mrs. Ashton; under her prevailing influence, he knew it would be vain to attempt a reformation. "For her own sake," he thought, "I will endeavour to enlarge her ideas; she will be happier, and we may live as friends; her lover I can never be."

The settlements were at length completed, to the apparent satisfaction of all parties, except Mrs. Ashton; every attempt

tempt of her's to effect her proposed plan proving insufficient to the accomplishment. In vain was Percival invited with jovial companions, whose only business in life was to circulate the bottle briskly. He resolutely declined their pressing solicitations, and remained in the full possession of his senses, while his companions wearied and perplexed him with their boisterous mirth, and often repeated tales.

At length the day for their nuptials was fixed ; to most lovers so circumstanced, the intermediate space appears long ; but this was not the case with Percival—to him the moments seemed winged with additional swiftness ; and the morning arrived before he was prepared for the event. With an aching heart he dressed himself on the morning appointed for the ceremony ; and without allowing himself to reflect on the solemn vows he was about to offer, he hastened to Mrs. Ashton's.

Sophia was adorned in all the elegant simplicity that apparel could display ; but
there

there was a degree of pleasure and exultation visible on her countenance, which was poison to the feelings of Percival.

Harriet Ashton was fantastically attired, to attend her friend as bridesmaid. She had, with a week's hard labour, perfected an *impromptu*, which she repeated with great pathos when Percival appeared.

Behold the happy bridegroom enter here !
Behold his rapture as he now draws near !
Behold the lovely bride, in purest white !
Behold her blushes at her lover's sight !
May this day's union prove your earthly bliss,
And make you happy as your hearts can wish !

At another time, such a composition would have excited Percival's risible faculties, but it could now only produce a faint smile.

Mr. Mallett and old Courtenay soon joined the party, and proceeded to church. The ceremony began—Percival felt a faintness come over him, which he vainly attempted to combat. When he approached

the altar, and when Mr. Mallett, in a slow, solemn voice, pronounced this charge—
“I require and charge ye both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it; for be ye well assured, that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God’s word doth allow, are not joined together by God, neither is their matrimony lawful;” every word seemed to plant an additional dagger in his heart, till no longer able to resist the violence of his feelings, he fell insensible on the railing that surrounded the altarpiece.

The consternation of the party may be easily conceived; the clerk and sexton, who had heard from his father’s servants that Mr. Percival was become very wild, whispered each other that they supposed he had not recovered the intoxication of the preceding evening.

Old

Old Courtenay now appeared, for the first time in his life, to feel for his son ; a tear strayed down his cheek at his evident distress. The ladies were too much agitated with fears of a disappointment, to admit one particle of pity for Percival.

Mr. Mallett was alone disinterestedly affected ; he threw off his surplice, and shut the book, and then went to support his unhappy young friend, whom he with difficulty assisted into the church-yard. The party would immediately have followed, but he requested them to stay till he returned to them.

It was long before Percival could recover his senses. "What a coward I am !" he at length exclaimed, while he pressed Mr. Mallett's hand with fervency. "I thank you, Sir, for your kind indulgence of my weakness ; I believed myself better fortified, but the awful effect of that ceremony is indescribable. In Heaven my vows are pledged to another—do I not, then, call perdition on myself by those I am

about to offer?—My poor deserted Helen, why will not thy adored image cease to haunt me?"—He threw himself on a newly-covered grave—"Thou art the resting-place that my affliction would seek: the happy are cut off in the midst of their enjoyments, even while the sunshine of prosperity illumines every object around them, and promises unvarying bliss, while the wretched court thy peaceful sanctuary in vain."

"Did I not make some allowance for the anguish that, for the present, overpowers your reason," said Mr. Mallett, "I should accuse you of presumption. Whom do you arraign in this discontented complaint?—have we a right to interrogate our Creator concerning the task he assigns us?—be assured, my friend, he will not make our burthen heavier than we can bear; and for every moment of misery here, he will trebly reward us in that world where the tear shall no longer flow, nor the heart throb with anguish. Let us, then, submit with cheer-

cheerfulness to the evils of this life, since, by so doing, we ensure our happiness in the next."

"I know it well, my good friend," said Percival, rising and endeavouring to compose himself; "I feel the strength of your arguments—my own heart acknowledges their correctness, and by its dictates shall my conduct be guided; but weak humanity rebels. Did the conquest respect only my own happiness, I could patiently submit; but when I recollect that another's peace—another——oh, how much dearer to me than my own life!—will share my misery—how can I conquer my feelings?"

Old Courtenay now approached; his sluggish conscience seemed for a moment awakened, and he could no longer be restrained from following his son. "My dear generous boy," said he, "let thy miserable but penitent father now implore thy forgiveness. I have been a villain, and am about to fill the measure of my sins, by sacrificing my dutiful child. Percival, my

life is of no value ; no longer, then, allow it to impede thy happiness. I see where your heart is bestowed—go, then ; and wed your Helen ; I will be present at the ceremony, to give you my blessing. A father's blessing, Percival, though he deserves not the name, shall cheer your prospects ; and if I pine away the remainder of my days in sad captivity, for the sins I have committed, you must try to forget my fate, for it is no more than I deserve ; I have never acted like a parent—indeed, Percival, I am a sorry fellow.”

Though Mr. Mallett was deeply affected, he could not repress a smile at old Courtenay's professed magnanimity ; it recalled Percival's fortitude. “ I regret the imbecility of nature, Sir,” said he, “ which all my struggles cannot conquer ; but this, I trust, is my last conflict. Conscience forbids my following your advice ; her reproaches would render me more wretched than the dreaded event which at this moment unmans me. I will acquire sufficient
firmness

firmness to go through the ceremony ; and if possible convince you that in so doing I have not sacrificed my happiness."

" Well, my dear boy," said his father, " I can only love and thank you, if you will be so obstinate, for the sacrifice is, I confess, more than my liberty is worth: shall we return, then, to the ladies?—I think they must be impatient at our delay."

" Not to-day," said Mr. Mallett, who feared the return of Percival's agitation ; " we will apologize to the ladies, and defer the celebration of the ceremony till Percival is better."

" Well, well, as you like," said the old man ; " only I think delays are dangerous, and the ladies will be disappointed ; but I would not distress my dear Percival for the world. I hope he will soon recover, and perhaps we may have a jovial day after all."

Mr. Mallett gave him a look full of the most ineffable contempt—to the effect of

which he was, however, insensible. Percival shook his head, in contradiction of his father's expectation.

With Mr. Mallett's assistance, he proceeded to his father's house, when he felt so thoroughly disordered, that he went immediately to bed.

Old Courtenay returned to the church, where he found the bride and her friends not a little disconcerted at the departure of the bridegroom. Mr. Courtenay could only inform them that a violent illness had suddenly seized his son, in consequence of which he was obliged to postpone the ceremony for a few days, when he hoped to be sufficiently recovered to repeat his attendance on the ladies.

Harriet Ashton, who thought it absolutely requisite for Sophia to faint, stationed herself so as to support her when she fell, and was considering what sinking attitude would prove most interesting, and produce the best subject for a poem, when Sophia declared, with less emotion than
was

was altogether warrantable in such circumstances, that she believed Percival's professed indisposition was only a fetch to cheat her of a husband, and that she should not wonder if he were to marry Helen after all; by way of consolation, she, however, declared that if he did put such a scheme in execution, she would make him pay for the deception to the very uttermost farthing; for though she could love him dearly as her own husband, she should hate him if he became the husband of Helen.

"Fie, Sophia," said Harriet, "how can you be so selfish and insensible, when the youth's refined feelings have alone caused his sudden disorder?—you positively do not deserve him—why cannot you keep pace with him? Was there ever a bride before, in your situation, that did not faint?—you have really spoilt the prettiest idea for a poem that ever entered my head, by your stubborn insensibility. A line, expressing the graceful dignity with which you fell into my arms, I had absolutely

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completed ; but I shall now be ashamed to repeat it, since there are so many witnesses of your unheroine-like firmness."

"Upon my troth," said Mr. Courtenay, "I am very glad she did not chuse to faint. I think if Percival's disorder proceeded from excess of sensibility, it is lucky she has not an equal share, for there would be the devil to pay if they should both be subject to such violent fits of feeling."

Mrs. Ashton was too much chagrined at this unexpected disappointment to declare her sentiments, therefore preserved a sullen silence while she proceeded towards her own dwelling.

Percival, whose agitated feelings had long-preyed on his constitution, now found himself so seriously ill, that he assented to Mr. Mallett's earnest entreaties to seek some medical assistance ; he believed, and almost hoped, that his complaints were beyond the reach of medicine ; but he tacitly consented to try its effects.

CHAP. XIII.

" On me no father bends his partial eyes ;
No mother in her fost'ring arm protects ;
My daily wants no tenderness supplies ;
My doubtful steps no precept now directs."

BIDLAND.

IN total ignorance of what passed at Alvondown, Helen spent her joyless hours, amidst a circle of uninteresting beings at Bath. All Lady Elvira's visitors were the mere acquaintance of a day, whose cold hearts sought no farther intimacy than the amusements of the present season. Helen was wearied with their insipidity ; she would not, at any other period of her life,

L 6.

have

have derived pleasure from such society ; but now, frivolity was particularly irksome to her feelings ; and her heart sickened at its repetition. Lady Elvira, too, treated her with increased coldness ; she had, therefore, no resource but solitude, which was ill calculated to alleviate her sorrow.— Every object now, to her disordered view, wore a sombre hue ; she had no friend in existence in whose bosom she could repose her griefs, and she secretly prayed for that summons which was to terminate all her earthly sufferings.

Hartly, indeed, never deserted her ; he had patience to endure, and to attempt softening her afflictions ; and when she refused to accompany Lady Elvira on her evening visits, he usually was her companion. The attention he paid her as a friend she felt grateful for ; and totally ignorant of his hidden intentions, she never reflected on the impropriety of admitting him in the absence of her friend ; nor did she remark that he never appeared till Lady

Elvira had taken her departure, and constantly retired before her return. That he had been her guest, would frequently, perhaps, have been declared, had not Lady Elvira now behaved to her with such frigid reserve. She seldom, indeed, addressed her, unless necessity obliged her so to do, and it was then so distantly, that Helen never ventured at more than a concise answer.

This kind of treatment she had invariably received for a fortnight ; when, painfully sensible of her dependent situation, she determined to seek an explanation from Lady Elvira, and afterwards procure some employment by which she might be enabled to support herself. Several times had she sought Lady Elvira, with the intention of declaring her purpose ; but her repulsive manner precluded the possibility of introducing the subject. As it was likely to prove a perpetual prevention, Helen at length resolved to write, when she

she could, she thought, with less embarrassment express her sentiments.

She had formed this plan a few minutes before she was summoned to dinner. In the parlour she found Hartly so deeply engaged in conversation with Lady Elvira, that they did not notice her entrance. The words she heard as she approached them were these :—

“ Upon my soul, Lady Elvira, you wrong me !—If you could read my heart, you would be convinced that it throbs with the most fervid affection for you, and you alone. Compassion for an unfortunate and friendless orphan, is the only sensation——”

At that moment, Helen's figure in the glass (to which he stood opposite) surprised him. A degree of embarrassment was visible in both him and Lady Elvira at the discovery.

The truth instantly flashed on Helen's mind. “ Is it possible,” thought she, “ that
such

such a woman as Lady Elvira can harbour so ungenerous a passion, so totally unlike herself in every other respect?—This inconsistency is a mortifying proof of our imperfect nature; how can she esteem a man whom she believes so inconstant?—and how can she condescend to expostulate with him?—That she despises me, if she can accuse me of such inexcusable duplicity and ingratitude, I cannot wonder; but it confirms my determination to quit her.”

No conversation between Hartly and Lady Elvira interrupted the train of Helen's reflections; the hour of dinner passed in almost total silence; and the moment the cloth was removed, she retired. It required the greatest exertion of fortitude to calm the perturbation of mind that this new incident occasioned; but it was now become absolutely necessary to form some plan for her immediate removal—to remain another day with Lady Elvira, branded with such a mortifying stigma, her feelings revolted against,

against. Yet she anxiously wished to undeceive her; but how could such an explanation be effected?—If she doubted Hartly's assertions—if she continued deaf to the protestations of a favoured lover, could Helen expect to be credited?—no, surely it was presumptuous to hope for such a preference. Was she, then, to depart under the unjust accusation bestowed on her, without an effort to assert her innocence?—such an idea was poison to her heart. What, then, was her alternative?—To whom could she apply for advice?—To Mr. Mallett, indeed, she might disburthen her heart, and claim his friendly protection—he would instruct her how to act with propriety; but how could she endure the thought of again becoming a pensioner on his bounty?—she, who had no claim, but from the goodness of his heart, to his kindness, how then could she accept his liberal beneficence, when she knew how limited was his income, and deprive other objects, perhaps far more deserving than herself,

herself, of his charitable donations?—"No," she exclaimed, "I have no friend to guide my youthful steps—no parent to shelter me from the world's rugged storms!—How singularly severe is my fate!—Oh, Courtenay, why was it our lot to be so cruelly severed?—In thy sympathising bosom I once fondly hoped to repose my cares and sorrows, but adversity has blasted my prospects!"

This was, however, no time to indulge fruitless complaints; a more important task was to be performed—a task that, to execute with propriety, required the utmost consideration. A thousand plans she formed and rejected; and at her usual hour of retiring, she found herself as undecided how to act as before she had bestowed on the subject.

The train of melancholy ideas which had occupied her mind since her departure from the dining-parlour, had been uninterrupted, for she declined Lady Elvira's invitation

tation to accompany her on an evening visit, and Hartly's request to be admitted she positively refused. At length, after many painful hours of irresolution and uncertainty, she formed the desperate determination of departing early the following morning, and letting chance direct her steps. To a verbal expostulation with Lady Elvira, she would have felt unequal, even could she have been assured of a favourable reception; but this, to her mortified feelings, appeared impossible: she therefore determined to put in practice the plan she had formed in the morning, of explaining herself in writing, "Perhaps when I am gone," she thought, with a sigh, "and Lady Elvira finds that I am become a deserted wanderer, her heart will relent, and she will acquit me of the treachery which she now believes me capable of practising."

Having at length used her most powerful exertions to compose her agitated spirits,

rits, she endeavoured to execute, with coherence, the task she had imposed on herself.

“ The respect and gratitude,” she wrote, “ which I owe that kind friend, who so generously raised me from a state of obscurity, is not—cannot be lessened by the injurious opinion she has now formed of me. No, Madam, the pain I feel is as much on your account as my own ; for I can appreciate the misery that a delicate and generous mind must experience from the idea of having its confiding liberality abused ; and that such are your Ladyship’s sentiments of me, I have the anguish to be convinced—though how little I deserve them, Heaven only knows ! —I will, however, make no protestations of my innocence, assured that time will brush off the cobweb veil which now obscures the truth. Your Ladyship suspects me of
the

the basest ingratitude and deceit; and under the stigma which these severe accusations throw on me, I am about to quit you: what inference you may draw from my departure, I know not, but I trust that candour will plead in favour of my integrity, and prevent you from misconstruing the motive that drives me from your hospitable asylum. After what I have this day heard, the conviction of being an unwelcome guest dwells too forcibly on my mind, to suffer a moment's hesitation with respect, to my resolution: forgive, then, Madam, my anxious wish to disburthen you of so hateful an intruder; and allow me to repeat that the kind protection which your Ladyship has afforded me, is a remembrance most deeply engraven on a heart which, however harshly it may be judged of, wants not warmth of gratitude and affection. I will confess that I am making the severest sacrifice to my feelings, in thus voluntarily resigning your Ladyship's liberality. That I do voluntarily

rily

rily resign it, I am well assured; for that generous heart which could so readily shield and support an unfortunate orphan, whose only claims were poverty and distress, could not wholly abandon its compassionate feelings, even though the object proved unworthy. Yes, Madam, I am convinced that the pitying tear would fall, and your outstretched hand attempt to save from destruction, even the depraved wretch that had poisoned your pleasures! —Oh, Lady Elvira!—and can you believe your poor Helen this lost creature?—Can you believe that heart, torn and afflicted as it is for one with whose it has been entwined from its earliest remembrance, could so soon forget the impression, and so lightly admit another, when, too, by so doing, it was to wound the peace of the best of friends?—To have incurred so cruel an imputation, excites a degree of anguish that I want words to express; but I must submit to my destiny, nor have I a right longer to intrude on your Ladyship's
time;

time ; with the warmest acknowledgments that a sincere heart can feel, then, allow me to subscribe myself

“ Your Ladyship’s

“ truly grateful friend,

“ HELEN COLEBY.”

Helen, after a sleepless night, arose early ; and as she thought she had no right to retain any thing which had been given her by Lady Elvira, she tied up the small wardrobe that she had brought with her from Alvondown ; and as none of the servants were up, she directed it to herself, and wrote a note to Lady Elvira’s woman, requesting her to take it in charge till she sent for it. She then descended the stairs, and opened the front door ; the street was empty, and a thick rain rendered the morning peculiarly gloomy ; she however quitted the house.

It was her determination to hire an obscure

scure lodging for a few days, and from thence write to Mr. Mallett an account of the circumstances that had driven her from Lady Elvira's, to request that he would prepare Agnes again to receive her at her cottage; and again entreat him (reluctant though she felt to intrude on his goodness) to use his interest to procure her some situation.

She passed through several streets before she saw any apartments which she thought sufficiently obscure to answer her purpose. At length she entered a house in which she supposed she might be accommodated.—The woman to whom it belonged shewed her two apartments on the second floor, which she immediately hired for a week.—She had, indeed, no money to pay for them; but a few superfluous articles of dress she had determined to deposit at a pawnbrokers, from which, she thought, she might be supplied with a sufficient sum to defray her expences at Bath, and her journey to Alvondown.

Her

Her landlady appeared greatly interested in her appearance, and kindly importuned her to partake of her breakfast, but she felt little inclination to accept the invitation; and after procuring a messenger to send for her parcel at Lady Elvira's, she retired to her room, and throwing herself on the bed, she gave vent to the emotions that pressed so heavily on her heart. Her first care was to address Mr. Mallett; this was a most painful task, but it was requisite to be performed; and at length, after several unsuccessful efforts, she opened her heart to her kind and only friend.

She had now to dispose of her clothes; the task of offering them at a place where, perhaps, they might one day be exposed to sale as unredeemed pledges, was most repugnant to her feelings, and the assurance that she must herself become the bearer, increased the distressing sensation; but convinced there was no alternative, except acquainting her landlady with her distress, which she considered it imprudent to do, she

she felt the necessity of combating her scruples. Tying the most valuable clothes she possessed together, therefore, she waited till the day declined, when pulling a large bonnet over her face, which, with the shades of evening, she believed a sufficient disguise to prevent a mortifying recognition from any of Lady Elvira's friends, she left the house, and tremblingly proceeded towards the shop of a pawnbroker, whose name she remembered to have noticed.

She had passed through two streets unmolested, and was turning into that in which lived the object of her search, when, at the corner, Hartly's figure surprised her. She was too near him to encourage a hope of escaping unobserved; and had not her person been sufficiently striking, her emotion of terror and astonishment would have announced it.

"Can this be possible?" he exclaimed.
"Miss Coleby alone in the street at such an hour?—You are surely unconscious of

the impropriety and the danger to which you expose yourself."

Helen was shocked at his remark, and the fervency with which it was spoken.

"I do not wish to expose myself causelessly, Sir," she replied; "but at present necessity compels me to brave the danger you so kindly warn me against."

"Necessity!" repeated he; "are you indeed reduced to such a state?—Could Lady Elvira act so unjustly?—She, indeed with reason, dreads the superiority of your charms; but I once believed her incapable of harbouring such narrow-minded prejudices."

"Spare Lady Elvira," interrupted Helen with quickness; "you, at least, have little reason to accuse her of injustice: and though I suffer so severely from the injurious suspicions she entertains of me, she is, I am convinced, an equal sufferer.—To believe herself deceived by two friends whom she has loved with such sincerity of affection, must be painful in the extreme;
but

but whatever she felt, she confined within her own breast. After what I yesterday heard, I was well aware that my presence must be painful to her, and I wished to spare her feelings the severe task of practising deceit, or depriving me of her protection. Circumstanced as I was, I thought it my duty to quit her without declaring my intention, which, probably, had I sought an interview, she would have endeavoured to dissuade me from; I therefore left the house this morning, and most sincerely hope that in so doing I shall restore to her the happiness of which I have so unfortunately deprived her."

"Generous girl!" he exclaimed; "how far, how very far superior are your sentiments to those of the selfish Lady Elvira!"

"Nothing can offend or shock me more than those invectives against Lady Elvira from you," she replied; "but you are now detaining me; and by this long conference subjecting me to the inconveni-

ences of which you have so recently warned me."

"No danger can be incurred, my sweet friend," he replied, "while I am your protector; and to my seeing you safe to your present residence, you cannot surely object."

"Indeed I must," she quickly answered; "and the greatest favour you can confer on me, will be to suffer me to proceed alone."

"Not at such an hour, Miss Coleby," said he; "friendship forbids—even Lady Elvira would, in the present instance, sanction my protection to her once-loved friend."

Helen stood a moment irresolute—it was necessary to procure money immediately, but to acquaint Hartly with her distress, and the errand on which she was going, pride and delicacy forbade. If she proceeded, he would accompany her; and if she returned, he would discover her habitation,

tation, which it was her most anxious wish to avoid. After a moment's hesitation, she however decided on the latter, as preferable to acknowledging her poverty ; she therefore silently returned, though without accepting the offered assistance of his arm. At the door she wished him good night, and hastened to her apartment, thoroughly disconcerted at the failure of her plan.

The following morning she arose early, and again taking her parcel, she proceeded to the shop of the pawnbroker, but it was not yet opened. Her disappointment was now extreme ; she must, then, undergo the mortification of exposing herself at mid-day. At night she could not summon resolution to venture again from the house. To add to her chagrin, she had but just turned from the shop, when Hartly overtook her. It was evident he had watched her steps, and of course guessed her business. A sensation of mortified pride caused her cheeks to glow when he accosted her.

“ Pardon this intrusion, Miss Coleby,”

he respectfully said ; " nor believe that idle curiosity alone has induced me to follow you. The confusion of your manner last night, and your evident wish to avoid me, spoke but too plainly the nature of your errand ; every feeling of my heart revolts against your having recourse to such an expedient. Allow me to become your banker ; surely friendship pleads for me. I can have no motive but the most disinterested one for offering my services."

" I do believe your generous proposal wholly disinterested," she replied ; " and accept my warmest gratitude for your wishes to assist me ; but indeed," she added, with a smile, " I possess a proud heart, which cannot submit to receive obligations, even from its oldest friends, without some degree of pain."

" But when you are assured that the obligation will be wholly mine, Miss Coleby," he rejoined, " I think you may condescend to accept my proposal, and
make

make use of my purse; you shall be my debtor, and repay me at your leisure."

"Not for the world," she replied; "I repeat that I feel truly grateful for your kindness, but I cannot, by any means, consent to accept it."

Hartly continued to press the proposal with warmth, and Helen as steadily to refuse it the whole way back to her lodgings, where she again took leave of him at the door.

At length, when she believed the pawnbroker's shop to be opened, she again departed with a palpitating heart, for it was now possible that she might encounter some of Lady Elvira's acquaintance; she however reached the shop without another interruption. She fortunately found the pawnbroker at home, and made the best bargain she could. The agitation with which she declared the purport of her business, evinced how ignorant she was of this sort of traffic; and the man to whom she applied, possessing a humane heart,

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compas-

compassionated her distress, and supplied her with a sum amounting to the full value of the articles she deposited in his hands; it was more than she expected to receive; and pleased with her success, she returned her acknowledgements, and departed.

It was a fine morning, and the streets began to fill; unfortunately she had to pass the pump-rooms, and all her terrors of being known were painfully realized, when she met Lady Woolcomb, attended by Mr. Clifton; the former immediately stopped.

"My dear Miss Coleby," she exclaimed, "how immensely rejoiced I am to see you!—you have undoubtedly received my card of invitation for Thursday?—You must positively be there—I shall never be happy more if I do not number you among my guests.—But come," added she, seizing her hand, "I bespeak you for the whole of this day; you must not plead a prior engagement. Lady Elvira is a monopolizer—I really envy her the enjoyment of your society. Come, Mr. Clifton, join
your

your entreaties—I know you intend lounging away the morning at my house, and I am sure we shall be very dull company—Miss Coleby will enliven us; for charity's sake, my dear, comply with my request."

"Ah do, Miss Colesly," said Clifton, with a yawn; "I beg pardon—I believe I do not rightly pronounce your name, but I am so cursedly absent, and my memory so habituated to the harmony of foreign appellations, that I lose the impression of our harsh-sounding English ones: but pray oblige her Ladyship—we shall be the quintessence of stupidity *tête-à-tête*; a third person is a relief, even without ideas."

"It will be impossible for me to accept your kind invitation, Madam," said Helen to Lady Woolcomb; "for I am engaged, and ——"

"I cannot admit your excuse, indeed," quickly interrupted her Ladyship; "I shall be completely miserable if you refuse. I will send a messenger to apprise Lady El-

vira that I have lain violent hands on you. Oh, if I could but prevail on you to return the affection I feel for you, and to exchange her protection for mine—how happy it would make me !”

“ I am not now with Lady Elvira,” said Helen.

“ Not with Lady Elvira !” repeated Lady Woolcomb, in a tone of the greatest astonishment.

“ I congratulate you on your good fortune, my Lady,” said Clifton ; “ Miss Copplesby will consent to make you happy, by placing herself under your protection ; she will, I doubt not, as readily become an appendage to your Ladyship’s suite as continue with Lady Elvira—a curiously lucky rencontre on both sides. Pray, young lady, do not refuse the generous overtures her Ladyship has made you ; shall I order your Ladyship’s carriage ?”

“ I am absolutely petrified with astonishment, Miss Coleby,” said Lady Woolcomb, whose voice seemed infected with the

consolidating quality, "at your imprudence in quitting so eligible a situation as Lady Elvira's. But come, Mr. Clifton, our friends at the Pump-room wait—Good morning, Miss Coleby—I beg pardon for having intruded on your time."

"Curse me," said Clifton, "what a strange revolution!—what variable beings you females are!—it is not so in Russia or Germany: a minute ago, you declared that this young lady's society would render you happier than the Empress, and now that it would be charity to maintain her, you reject the claim: stupify me if it can be wondered at that we leaders of the ton reject your trammels!—Your husbands must be formed like weathercocks, insensible to every thing but the blast that is levelled at and turns them irresistibly to its purposes."

Helen felt more contempt than resentment for Lady Woolcomb, and smiled at the change these few words had effected—"I am no longer with Lady Elvira."

Ruminating on the littleness of mind which produced this alteration, she proceeded without attending to the passengers, till a voice, which she instantly recognised for Maria Elton's, accosted her. Supposing that she should meet with a similar reception to that she had so recently experienced from Lady Woolcomb, she merely answered Miss Elton's salutation, and was proceeding; but Maria stopped, and politeness obliged her to do the same. She might have concealed her departure from Lady Elvira's; but when Miss Elton gave her a pressing invitation to spend a day with her mother and herself, she felt (notwithstanding the ill consequence that this piece of intelligence had so lately occasioned) that there would be a degree of equivocation in so doing which ill-suited the openness of her heart; she therefore confessed that she was no longer one of her Ladyship's family.

Miss Elton expressed her astonishment, but it lessened not the cordiality of her expressions.

expressions. She requested Helen to favour her with her address, which being readily complied with, she departed.

Helen returned to her lodgings without further interruption, and in the evening received the following letter.

CHAP. XIV.

“ ————— and virtue glow’d

In all her smiles without forbidding pride.”

THOMSON.

“ WILL you, my dear Miss Coleby, forgive this intrusion from a stranger?—and will you not accuse that stranger of impertinent curiosity, should she presume to ask any questions respecting your present situation?—I can plead nothing in extenuation of my conduct but the sincerity of my heart, of which I hope one day to convince you.

“ My daughter met you accidentally this morning, and heard from yourself that you
had

had quitted Lady Elvira Musgrove ; pardon, then, my dear Miss Coleby, the anxiety of a friend : I have seen but little of you—that little has, however, created an interest in your favour that I am convinced will be lasting. Will you, then, so far trust to the impression, as to comply with my wishes, to become, at least for some time, my guest ? If you have been deceived in Lady Elvira, you will, perhaps, be less inclined to credit hasty decisions professed in your favour ; but if I tell you the important services you can render me, I hope to convince you how great will be the obligation you confer. You well know the malady which brought me to this place with the hope of obtaining relief ; a mitigation of pain is, however, all the benefit I have derived from my residence here ; and as at my time of life, I have no reason to expect such a renovation of strength or spirits as can enable me to support the festive scenes of youthful conviviality, I naturally anticipate retirement as the accomplishment

ment of my wishes. Maria is a good girl, and sacrifices many pleasures to devote her time to me; this conviction destroys the effect. I know she loves not seclusion; and though she cheerfully resigns the pursuits that are most congenial to her age and disposition, that cheerfulness encreases the reluctance I feel to deprive her of them.— You, Miss Coleby, I think, if we can ever judge from external appearances, derive no pleasure from associating with the gay and mixed throng; and to enjoy the conversation of a young friend who has fortitude to endure the constant gravity, and perhaps monotony of subjects, to which age and infirmity may incline, without a repining sensation, would afford me a greater source of consolation than I can describe. I will say no more—you see the selfish motive that actuates my request, and you must therefore be convinced that in complying with my wishes, it is you who will confer an obligation.

“ Let me know your determination, and
rest

rest assured that however you decide, you will possess the regard and good wishes of your

“Sincere friend,

“CHARLOTTE ELTON.”

Tears of gratitude stole from Helen's eyes as she read this affectionate letter.—She had, even in a stranger, found a friend whose reliance on her rectitude was sufficiently powerful to induce her to offer an asylum, without enquiring what had occasioned Lady Elvira's displeasure against her; the delicacy of this conduct had its fullest effect on her heart. The proposal was certainly eligible—but would it be permanent?—might not some unforeseen event occur to deprive her of Mrs. Elton's friendship, as it had already done of Lady Elvira's?—“How painful is a state of dependence!” thought she, with a sigh;

“oh

“ oh that I could procure a situation where I might earn the bread of industry !”

Before she decided on any plan, she determined to await the opinion and advice of Mr. Mallett, from whom she depended on hearing by the return of post. Ruminating on the occurrences of this eventful day, she had passed great part of the evening, when some one tapped at her door; she opened it, and was both surprised and displeased at beholding Hartly.

He made some apologies for his intrusion, and requested that she would permit him to spend half an hour with her, to which request she made no answer. Accepting, however, her tacit acquiescence, he seated himself, and entered into a conversation, apparently without design, which evinced the most disinterested regard for her; and at its conclusion, added—
“ You have long known me, Miss Coleby, and have you ever, during the progress of our acquaintance, found reason to censure
my

my conduct, either with respect to yourself, or Lady Elvira?"

Helen confessed she had not; for never had she perceived any attention paid to herself, more than Lady Elvira's friendship for her demanded.

"Can you, then," asked Hartly, "vindicate Lady Elvira's conduct either to yourself or me?—I will not simply call it ungenerous—it is both envious and malicious. She raised you from a situation from which your merits ought to have shielded you, but to which you were destined by relentless fate, only to render your return to that obscurity the more severely painful; and indeed has added to her injustice, by casting a reproach on your character, the invention of which I once believed her heart would have revolted against. You are shocked, Miss Coleby, at this new proof of her malice; and it is with the greatest pain I grieve you with the repetition; but it is necessary that you should be made acquainted with what has passed.

What

What would you have thought of me, had not I vindicated you against such unjust aspersions?—I did so with warmth, and the consequence has been a final rejection of my suit. I will not say that I suffer severely from the disappointment, for in my breast, Miss Coleby, affection can never survive esteem. Where, then,” continued he, after a pause, during which he fixed his eyes on Helen, “can those sensations unite so fully as in the charming friend with whom I am now conversing?—Yes, Helen, my heart has long confessed the power of your transcendent virtues; and what, since Lady Elvira has forfeited every claim to my regard, should withhold me from declaring my partial sentiments to her who, I will flatter myself, will not reject them.”

Helen had been too much surprised at this novel style from Hartly to interrupt him; the conclusion of his speech, however, which with such confidence asserted her approbation of his offer, it was requisite

site immediately and decisively to contradict.

“ If you think I could hesitate one moment, Sir, on such a subject, you little know me; and circumstanced as I now am, I will not even thank you for the compliment you have paid me. Lady Elvira deserves your regard—for a long period of time you led her to believe she possessed it: to rival her, or to inspire sentiments of partiality in a mind so fickle, is, in my opinion, far from desirable or gratifying.— Perhaps you give our sex credit for the possession of that selfish vanity which derives satisfaction from imputed superiority of charms, and that can exultingly enjoy the misery of her at whose expence the compliment is paid, even though that neglected being should be a friend, for whom we have professed the most disinterested affection. The cant of friendship is, I confess, very prevalent in the world with those whose cold hearts know not the sentiment; but in some, I hope in many
breasts,

breasts, it exists with sincerity; and depend on it, Mr. Hartly, the bosom in which such a sentiment has really a place, can find no comfort while the object on whom it is bestowed is wretched; much less can it build its happiness on the very circumstance that occasions this acute misery."

Hartly was thunderstruck at this spirited reply, as well as the manner in which it was delivered. He had not doubted Helen's acceptance of his offer; he had represented Lady Elvira's unjust and acrimonious resentment, which, by the bye, had neither been felt nor expressed but by his inventive brain, with the hope of exciting in Helen a spirit of revenge, that would embrace, with avidity, an opportunity of triumphing over so unfeeling and malignant a rival—not that he had the least intention of putting his proposed plan in execution. Could he have obtained her consent, indeed, he would have deceived her with a mockery of the solemn marriage ceremony; but the real performance he
still

still designed should take place with Lady Elvira.

His plausible tongue, ever eloquent, he believed would very successfully plead his cause with that lady, whose partial sentiments, he was assured, would favour his suit. She had indeed refused to admit him since the departure of Helen ; but this temporary banishment he persuaded himself was dictated by mortified pride, which would readily yield to his irresistible arguments. To console her during this self-inflicted penance, and likewise to deprecate her anger, and declare his own misery, he wrote to her, and represented in strong, though submissive terms, the cruelty and injustice of her conduct towards him.

In this letter he might have endeavoured to vindicate the deserted and injured Helen ; but such an attempt formed no part of his scheme : far from being influenced by any generous motives towards her, he sought, by every sly insinuation with which imagination could furnish him, to convey
to

to the prejudiced mind of Lady Elvira an assurance that this cherished favourite was a finished deceiver, whose artifices had, for a moment, clouded his understanding, which he added, open and guileless as was his heart, was easily duped by her inexplicable hypocrisy; he however rejoiced that her Ladyship's superior discernment had penetrated the flimsy veil that hid her artful schemes. He now plainly discovered the motives that actuated her conduct, which, together with his constant and increased veneration for her Ladyship's superior virtues, would steel his heart to every future attempt.

This letter answered not the intended purpose; the ungenerous severity with which he censured Helen—the unfortunate Helen, that was now a deserted orphan, betrayed a degree of selfish insensibility which Lady Elvira felt it impossible to forgive. “Could she be happy with such a man?” she asked herself: the result was, that as a lover she would never more receive

ceive him. But though she condemned the flinty-hearted Hartly, she was by no means reconciled to her disgraced favourite; she rejoiced that she had been spared the irksome task of driving her on that fate which, she feared, too certainly awaited her: but the impression of her shocking ingratitude and duplicity had turned Lady Elvira's heart against her, and her sudden departure was, in the opinion of the former, a still further convincing proof of her guilt. She breathed a sigh indeed, when she recollected the infamy and sufferings to which the unhappy girl would, probably, be reduced; and could she have saved her, without confessing by what friendly hand she was relieved, duty and compassion would have induced her to make the attempt: she however made no strenuous efforts to discover her present situation, contenting herself with the reflection, that Helen's own conscience, rather than her severity, incited her to quit

a roof under which she had been hitherto sheltered with such hospitality.

Hartly had been too severely mortified at the manner in which Helen received his (as he considered it) flattering proposal, to attempt renewing it; he therefore soon departed, not however doubting but adversity would subdue her pride, and in time bend her to his purpose. He suspected not the friendly letter she had so recently received from Mrs. Elton, and therefore flattered himself with the assurance of success.

Though Helen was wholly unconscious of what passed in his mind, she felt more hurt than gratified at the offer he had made her. She was now impatiently awaiting the receipt of Mr. Mallett's letter; from this consolation she was not long withheld. He lamented with sincerity the change in her situation, and expressed Agnes's readiness to receive her; but added, that it was his particular wish she should

should not visit Alvondown immediately. Percival Courtenay still remained too ill to permit the marriage ceremony to be performed, and he thought her return at so critical a moment, especially under such circumstances, might retard his recovery. That she might experience no pecuniary inconvenience, he enclosed a bill, which he requested her to oblige him by accepting.

While Helen wept over this letter, her tears were produced by the mingled sensations of pleasure and pain. Mr. Mallett's kindness was a consoling balm to her heart, but Courtenay's misery counteracted the soothing effect. No longer, however, did a doubt remain respecting her acceptance of Mrs. Elton's offer. She hesitated whether she should repeat to her new friends the circumstances that had influenced Lady Elvira's conduct towards her; but when she recollected that such a confession would appear like vanity, exulting in the narrow-minded superiority of mere

N 2

personal.

personal charms, she determined to suppress it; she however immediately answered Mrs. Elton's letter, in which she expressed her warmest gratitude for the favourable sentiments she had expressed for her, and declared her readiness to accept her very liberal proposal.

This answer, as she expected, brought Mrs. Elton's carriage to her door in the evening. Her arrangements were soon settled, and in a few minutes she bade her friendly landlady adieu.

Maria, whom she found alone, received her with real friendship. She expressed great pleasure in the anticipation of living with a friend in whom she could confide—"My mother," said she, "is very kind and indulgent; but you know, my dear, there are some subjects on which it is impossible to enter with ^{her} her. People of my mother's age are very apt to ridicule those ideas as romantic, which, perhaps, occupy the largest share of a young woman's thoughts."

Helen

Helen understood not exactly to what subject Maria alluded ; she however assured her that nothing would afford her so high a degree of satisfaction, as the conviction of contributing, in any degree, to the happiness of those friends who had acted with such disinterested generosity towards her.

Helen embraced the earliest opportunity to inform Mr. Mallett of the happy change that had taken place in her favour. She considered it now her sole duty to attend to Mrs. Elton ; and she found her reward in the sound sense and calm resignation evinced in that lady's whole deportment. —Her conversation was a balm to the heart of Helen ; it convinced her, that though deprived of many blessings in this world, the mind subdued, and resting its hope of happiness only on an eternal reward, could be supported with serenity, and even cheerfulness, through all the trials and miseries of life.

Helen sought to follow this example ;

she endeavoured to be happy: and though she could not conquer the sad and painful sensations that obtruded whenever the recollection of her former happiness possessed her mind, she was, in a great measure, comforted.

CHAP. XV.

"Welcome, ye shades! ye bowery thickets, hail!

Ye lofty pines! ye venerable oaks!

Ye ashes wild resounding o'er the steep!

Delicious is your shelter to the soul."

THOMSON.

MARIA Elton, whose heart had never been chastened by any serious misfortune, felt no inclination to shun society; and though she spent much time with her mother, naturally sought recreation and amusement among the young and gay.—Helen was always invited to join her parties, but her heart still sickened at the thought of mixing with the vivacious; the

N 4

fear

fear of meeting Lady Elvira, too, was another obstacle to her leaving Mrs. Elton house.

Lady Elvira's visits to that place had ceased since Helen became its inhabitant, but she could not be sure that she had declined joining the parties of her other acquaintance.

Helen could not, however, with all her precautions, escape an interview with Lady Woolcomb one morning. She was sitting in the breakfast-parlour at work with Maria, when that lady entered, at rather an earlier hour than is usual for Bath visitants. On perceiving her, Helen fixed her eyes on her work, determined not to be mortified by her insolence. Lady Woolcomb however immediately recognised her; and now, perceiving that it would no longer be a disgrace to acknowledge she had been acquainted with her, she was resolved to compensate for her former rudeness.

"My dear Miss Coleby," she exclaimed, running immediately up to her, "how happy

happy I am to see you here!—I have a world of apologies to make for my apparent incivility when I had last the happiness of seeing you; indeed it violently wounded my feelings to leave you so abruptly, but my party were waiting, and I was absolutely fated to treat them or you with rudeness: inclination would certainly have prompted me to stay with you, but I knew your goodness so well—and the etiquette of the world must be preserved. But,” proceeded she, determined to prevent Helen from answering, “how long have you been with Miss Elton?—How fortunate she is!”—Then turning to her—“My dear Maria, I trust you will be immensely fond of Miss Coleby; I really envy you such a companion. Lady Elvira’s want of discernment and liberality in resigning such an invaluable treasure, I can never forgive. Good morning, my dear Maria—I have a world of visits to make before dinner—and should I be so unfortunate as to find any of my friends at home, I am undone for the day.”

“I am

"I am sorry my servant was not sufficiently well bred to deny me," said Maria, "since your being introduced proved such a terrible infringement on your time."

"Oh, my dear," said she, "you are an exception, certainly; I am always so happy to see and converse with you, for you are among the number of my most chosen favourites. I shou'd have been immensely wretched the whole day, had you not admitted me. Adieu; do visit me soon; I will give particular orders that you shall be admitted; and be sure you bring your charming friend with you."

So saying, away she tripped.

"And I shall take particular care to return your call when you will not be visible," said Maria; "but I need give myself no trouble on that head—every one of her acquaintance, who is unfortunate enough to see her, is entertained with the same cant of being her most favoured friend."

"If this is fashionable life," exclaimed
Helen,

Helen, with fervency, "may I end mine as I began it—in total obscurity."

Determined to run no risk of again encountering her Ladyship, she confined herself entirely to Mrs. Elton's apartment; and most sincerely did she rejoice when the time arrived for their quitting Bath.—With alacrity she prepared to accompany her friends to their country residence.

Maria did not feel quite so callous to the amusements she was about to resign, and she dropped a tear when she bade them adieu; it, however, soon dried as the carriage proceeded, and the beauties and pleasures of a country life became the subject of conversation.

"I do not dislike a country life, Madam," said Maria, in answer to her mother's recommending retirement for the improvement of her mind, by the studies of nature, "and I am sure, with a few individuals such as I could select, I should be happy in any part of the world; but surely it is impossible to quit so many friends without feeling

feeling something like sorrow at the separation."

Mrs. Elton smiled; she could have said—
"How little are you acquainted with the real sentiments of those who profess themselves so!—and how readily does the innocent, inexperienced heart receive those common-place unmeaning expressions of regard, that are indiscriminately bestowed on all!"—but she repressed the sentiment; for she wished not to steel the warm confiding heart of her daughter, by cold, though just suspicions of insincerity in those with whom she mixed.

Lemonbrook, Mrs. Elton's seat, was situated in a sweet retired valley, which now appeared in its highest state of fertility.—The tall and ancient trees that overshadowed the avenue, and in some degree the house, threw rather a melancholy gloom on its appearance. There was something altogether in this spot truly congenial to Helen's feelings; a sort of sympathy seemed to prevail.

It

It was at that silent hour when the sun just retiring sheds its last ray on the western hill—when no sound reached their ear, save the soft zephyr gently agitating the leaves, and now and then the chirping grasshopper, that they reached this secluded dwelling.

Helen indulged the pleasing, though melancholy ideas that now filled her bosom; they rather soothed than grieved her. “Oh, may I ever find this a sheltering roof,” she internally exclaimed; “and if such is my fortunate lot, never—never will I repine at the sorrows I have endured. I will endeavour to forget that I was ever happier; and in the society of my kind and valuable friends, I shall soon feel in reality the cheerfulness that I now think it my duty to assume:”—but an obstinate sigh, which seemed to heave from the very bottom of her heart, in some measure contradicted the assertion; she however determined that no efforts of hers should be wanting to effect the reformation.

She

She did not find her situation at all less comfortable than she expected; from Mrs. Elton she experienced the attention of a tender parent, and from Maria the affection of a sister; but in the latter she soon discovered a foible which she felt most anxious to correct—it was that kind of vanity that led her to believe almost every man who spoke a civil word to her a lover; it had, in some degree, been discovered to Helen at Bath, but now that she was her chosen friend and confidant, it was unfolded in a more extensive manner; indeed it appeared to Helen that she could scarcely converse with an unmarried man without expecting a confession of love from him. This weakness was to Helen so extraordinary, that she could term it nothing less than a temporary insanity.

Maria wanted not understanding; indeed, in Helen's opinion, it was far above mediocrity in every other respect: how therefore to account for such a glaring defect, by any other means than imputing it

to partial derangements, she knew not.— But though the vanity of having many lovers so strongly possessed Maria's imagination, she had long disposed of her heart, decidedly and unconditionally, to Mr. George Lifford, a young barrister, whose father and sister resided near Lemonbrook; they were an amiable family, and a great acquisition to the Eltons, with whom they were in habits of intimacy.

END OF VOL. I.

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